

# RUSSIAN FAMILIES

Acc. No.	16207
Class No.	G. 36.
Book No.	6



# RUSSIAN FAMILIES

BY  
PEARL BINDER

WITH FORTY-SEVEN DRAWINGS  
BY THE AUTHOR

ADAM AND CHARLES BLACK  
4, 5 & 6 SOHO SQUARE LONDON W.1

1942



THIS BOOK IS PRODUCED IN  
COMPLETE CONFORMITY WITH  
THE AUTHORIZED ECONOMY STANDARDS

*Australia and New Zealand*

THE OXFORD UNIVERSITY PRESS, MELBOURNE

*Canada*

THE MACMILLAN COMPANY OF CANADA, TORONTO

*South Africa*

THE OXFORD UNIVERSITY PRESS, CAPE TOWN

*India and Burma*

MACMILLAN AND COMPANY LIMITED  
BOMBAY      CALCUTTA      MADRAS

MADE IN GREAT BRITAIN

PRINTED BY MORRISON AND GIBB LTD., LONDON AND EDENBURGH



## FOREWORD

PEOPLE often say to me, " Politics and economics are all very well, but what we really want to know is how ordinary Russians live their everyday lives."

So here is a book about ordinary Soviet people living their everyday lives. It is about homes and meals, work and play, relations, babies, birth, marriage and death. All the characters are people I knew when I lived in Russia.

The period of this story is the year 1938.

PEARL BINDER

SHREWSBURY

1942

FOR  
ELWYN  
AND  
ELIZABETH



## PEOPLE IN THIS STORY

LUDMILLA PAVLOVA. Aged twenty. Worker in a Moscow textile factory.  
GRISHA PAVLOV. Aged twenty-six. Her brother. Corporal in the Far Eastern Red Army.

MAMMA PAVLOVA. Aged forty-four. Their mother, a widow. Worker in a crèche kitchen.

POLINA. Aged twelve. A cousin. School-girl.

*This family lives in flat 309.*

PROFESSOR ALEXANDER BORODIN. Aged sixty. Director of the Folk Arts Museum of Moscow.

ELIZAVETTA IVANOVNA BORODINA. Aged sixty. His wife.

PETKA. Their adopted son. Aged sixteen. Apprentice in an aviation factory.

BORIS. Aged thirty-nine. Their son. Journalist.

*This family lives in flat 310.*

OLEG KRAVCHENKO. Aged thirty-five. Engineer and airplane designer.

DOCTOR GULSUN-OI KRAVCHENKO. Aged thirty. His wife. An Uzbek woman doctor.

LEONID. Aged one. Their son.

*This family lives in flat 311.*

SASHA VASSILIEV. Aged twenty-two. Electrical engineer. Ludmilla's fiancé.

PAPA VASSILIEV. Aged fifty. His father. Worker in a bakery.

MAMMA VASSILIEVA. Aged forty-five. His mother. A Ukrainian peasant.

LYUBA, IRA, VERA, NATASHA, SEMYON, PAVEL AND IVAN. His younger brothers and sisters.

*This family lives in an old-fashioned flat on Arbat, Moscow.*

UNCLE FEDOR. Aged sixty. Metal-worker. Lives in Leningrad.

AUNTIE SOFIA. Aged fifty-nine. His wife.

JANE BRETT. Aged thirty-one. An American journalist working in Moscow.

MISS ETHEL PARKER. Aged sixty-five. An English teacher living in Moscow.

YURA. A train acquaintance. Aged nineteen. Candidate for Red Army.

VALODYA. A holiday acquaintance. Aged sixteen.



of joy dimming her silver-rimmed spectacles, and Boris, tough journalist though he is, is returning her embrace most vigorously. They have nothing at all in common except that she is his mother and he is her son, and yet what a lot that is.

As a matter of fact Madame Borodina hasn't much in common with anyone. She is a quiet dreamy old lady, fragile in health, who worships her distinguished husband and brilliant son without in the least understanding their work. She has a loving heart but little practical knowledge of the world. She goes through life in a haze and spends a great deal of time working beautiful cross-stitch embroidery on all the family towels. Yet she is one of those women who, by the very delicacy of their natures, call forth love and devotion from those around them. Especially does she attract to herself characters totally different from her own. She and young Petka, for instance, have an oddly warm relationship, such as might exist between a shaggy mongrel puppy befriended by a Persian kitten.

Boris slips out of his fur overcoat and taking his mother's arm leads her back into the Pavlov sitting-room.

Boris is slightly built, but taut as a coiled spring. He is pale, black-haired, with narrow grey eyes and an old scar cutting across his right cheek-bone. He might be any age. Actually he is nearly forty. He wears European clothes. He seems an ordinary sort of person until he starts to speak, for his voice is one not easily forgotten—a husky voice vibrant with energy. He is one of the star foreign correspondents of the newspaper *Pravda* and equally fluent in eight languages. He is a member of the Communist Party and his scar dates from the Civil War when he fought on the Siberian front. His is a life spent amongst journalists, Embassies, Foreign Offices, and ticker-tapes; a life of sudden, mysterious assignments, trans-continental expresses, long-distance 'planes, with a diagnostic ear pressed to the heat of world affairs.

Just now he is brimming with pleasure to be back again in Russia in his family circle and among his good neighbours. He shakes hands briskly with everyone, gives Grisha an affectionate punch in the ribs and insists on kissing blushing Ludmilla on both cheeks. He has a present for her packed away in his smart leather suit-case, something preposterous and unsuitable from the *Grand Maison de Blanc*, for Boris has no idea of money at all.

Now that Boris has come, the party is complete. Mamma Pavlova produces several bottles of Crimean white wine and a highly ornamental sugar-cake. There is much toasting and chaffing. Grisha blows a preliminary wheeze out of his accordion. In a moment they are all singing.

"This is all just a prelude," thinks Ludmilla, happy and sad at the same time. "Everything doesn't really start until to-morrow, the real party

and Sasha and me husband and wife, and everything all new and lovely. What a pity Uncle Fedor and Auntie Sofia can't be here too."

Grisha's song is nearing its finale :

" . . . I thought I would listen awhile.  
But that dancing smile,  
Those eyes so blue and gay  
Have stolen my heart away.  
O please tell me your name,  
From where and why you came. . . ."

Papa Vassiliev is solemnly smoothing his moustache. Yes, the moment has come. He rises to his feet with a little cough.

It was long after two. All the guests had gone. Ludmilla undressed quickly and slipped into her cotton nightshift. Polina was already sound asleep in her narrow iron bed, quietly breathing underneath the red eider-down on to which the sheet was buttoned, Russian fashion.

Ludmilla washed, cleaned her teeth, brushed her yellow hair. The eve of her marriage. In romantic books, she thought, this was the most poignant moment of a girl's life. The bride-to-be always sat for hours in front of her beautiful toilet mirror, prinking and mooning.

But Ludmilla wasn't a girl out of a novel, though she was indeed romantic, like most of the youth of her country. She was romantic about different things, and in a different way. She was romantic, for instance, about the progress of her country and romantic about her work and Sasha's work and the part they were playing in the forward movement of their Soviet life, of which she felt and Sasha felt ardent and responsible units. Ludmilla was romantic about love too and about the children she would have, for she felt sure that her children would live to see great things in the wonderful future that was literally just round the corner. She felt the world to be on the knife-edge of scientific developments which would alter the whole pattern of living . . . immensely faster communication for instance, the possibility even of inter-planetary communication, the conquest of disease and the total abolition of poverty all over the world . . . Ludmilla felt that her country had already solved so many problems that if only they were given time to continue their work many wonders could be brought into the realms of possibility, as a powerful telescope draws forward vague distant vistas. She had no economic fears for the future : she felt sure that so long as they played their part fairly in Soviet life they were quite secure from want, and their children would be well cared-for, properly educated and made into worth-while people.

If only they were given time. That was the difficulty, for she knew that once a world-war started its flames would lick hungrily at the

vast frontiers of her country ; she knew the Nazis had long turned lustful eyes in the direction of the fertile Ukraine. And war would destroy so much, set them back so far, though of its outcome she had not the faintest doubt. And it wasn't only that war would snatch from her Sasha and Grisha—for she herself would be involved just as much—war was foul and inhuman and horrible waste. Here they were building and building and wanted to go on building. She knew it must come, this war. But let it not be yet.

Ludmilla wanted very much to have a daughter for her first-born—there was so much for girls to do now in Soviet Russia—their lives were so full and fearless, and she could become anything she chose if she was intelligent and worked hard. For it was from simple people like herself and Sasha that the leaders of her country were for the most part recruited.

Her thoughts were interrupted by her mother who tip-toed into the room. Mamma Pavlova sat down beside her daughter's bed and smoothed the yellow hair with an affectionate hand.

"I felt I wanted to come in and see you, daughter. What are you thinking of?"

Without waiting for an answer, Mamma Pavlova went on : "It seems such a terribly short time since you were born, my darling. It was in the winter, right in the middle of the famine of 1920, and soon after father was lost. I was so weak and unhappy I could scarcely feed you, and you were such a tiny hungry creature, with your little beak always open for more, like a baby bird. . . . I can't think how we all lived through those terrible months. Everything went wrong. I knew there was no hope of father ever returning, for he was still weak from his wound in the Civil War and couldn't have survived long in that weather. And then Grisha and my poor little Ivan both contracted typhoid and Ivan was too weak to resist it . . . so I lost my husband and my second son within a few weeks of each other. But most of all I mourned for father. I loved him so much . . . he was such a good husband and such a fine man . . . everyone respected him. We hoped to have many children . . . yet it was not to be. That cruel winter day he put on his little embroidered cap and went out to seek bread for us, and he never came back. You are the living image of him, Ludmilla," went on Mamma Pavlova, tears now rolling down her cheeks and dropping on to her apron. "From the moment you were born it was like a miracle to see his dear countenance looking out at me from your infant face. Grisha was always like me in his looks and in his character, but you, my Miliushka, you are your father all over again.

"Now all I can wish you, my darling, is that you and Sasha may be as united in your marriage as father and I were. Sasha is a good hardworking lad, and his family are solid working-class stock. Trust each other always,



and have many children. That is the greatest thing in life. . . Now I must leave you to sleep, for I wish you to look fresh and pretty to-morrow. But first let me give you something that father gave me for a betrothal gift. It isn't grand, you see, for we were poor working people, but it's good. Father wouldn't ever have anything shoddy." Mamma Pavlova fumbled in her bosom and pressed something into Ludmilla's hand.

It was a heart-shaped gold locket on a thin chain. Inside the locket was a faded photograph of a fair-haired man with a moustache and clear eyes, Ludmilla's father.

She bent over the bed to embrace Ludmilla, who returned her embrace warmly, nuzzling her snub nose affectionately into her mother's neck without saying a word. One of the most expressive things about Ludmilla's character was her eloquent silences.





*Wedding*

WITH a scratchy pen dipped in violet ink Ludmilla signed the document the registrar placed before her. The simple civil ceremony was complete. She was now Vassilieva, Sasha's wife.

The registrar shook hands and wished them happiness as warmly as though they were the first couple she had ever united. She was an expansive woman and enjoyed officiating at the marriages of the crowds of young people who came to get registered. She had held the same job for years now and noted with satisfaction that divorces were decreasing. Life in the Soviet Union was settling down nicely. She rearranged her haircomb once or twice with a purr of contentment. Yes, she liked her job, and she liked her small but important office (dominated by large portraits of Karl Marx, Engels, Lenin and Stalin), where she felt she too was helping to make history.

She beamed upon Sasha and Ludmilla as they walked out, arm-in-arm, Ludmilla holding her flimsy marriage certificate, the violet ink not yet dry.

Outside, both families were gathered in full force, muffled in furs and padded coats, and stamping their high felt boots in the snow to keep warm. Papa Vassiliev, with the adroitness of a conjurer, produced a large bunch of flowers from behind his back and presented them to Ludmilla. There were kisses and embraces all round. The young people then went off to the Park to skate, and the old people hurried to the Vassiliev flat on Arbat to make preparations for the wedding party that evening.

Ludmilla and Sasha struggled on to a crowded tram which was clanging its ponderous way down the broad boulevard in the direction of the Gorki Pleasure Park. Ludmilla peered through a hole someone had rubbed with a kopek in the thick ice on the window of the tram.

It was a gay scene. All Moscow seemed to be out-of-doors that day. The tree-lined boulevard was alive with moving figures. There were mothers and fathers out for a walk with their families; sweethearts, walking arm-in-arm, wholly absorbed in each other; young mothers taking their babies for an airing in wicker prams mounted on runners, or dragging their small children behind them on sledges through the snow. The small children were muffled in curly white lambskin, shawls wound round their heads, thick woollen mittens on their hands and felt boots on their feet.

The babies were swaddled securely in crimson eiderdowns bound with cross-gartering, and with nothing showing but a tip of rosy face peeping out of embroidered white linen.

Queues of people were buying newspapers from the corner kiosks. Street hawkers were busy selling brilliantly coloured artificial flowers. Groups of laughing children, with skates tucked under their arms or skis mounted on their shoulders, were making for the Park, and women laden with shopping-baskets were stopping to exchange greetings. The sky was a frosty blue and the gaunt saplings stood out hard as inklines against the whiteness of the snow.

The tram was absolutely packed, so that the conductress could not even attempt to force her way through to take fares. Each passenger, however, meticulously passed up his kopeks, hand to hand, until they reached her. Right at the very front of the tram, close behind the driver, were two vacant seats. Presently a strapping woman, five months or so with child, boarded the tram at the driver's end and settled herself comfortably into one of the vacant seats. Moscow seemed to be full of expectant mothers, and the two reserved seats were never vacant for long, even on the shortest journey.

Two stops before the Gorki Park Sasha and Ludmilla began to get ready to struggle out of the tram.

"What a fool I am," remarked Sasha, elbowing his way off, "we should have come by Metro . . . now we've got it built at last."

"Never mind," replied Ludmilla consolingly, "we'll go back to Arbat by Metro, shall we?"

The Gorki Pleasure Park was decorated with gay little flags of red bunting, which fluttered invitingly in the wind. Throngs of people were filing eagerly through the turnstiles and scattering in all directions once they got inside. The children made straight for the Children's Section, to their own sports grounds, their own cinema, their own Zoo, and their own special theatre and playrooms. There were several art exhibitions for older people, a cinema and two dance-halls, besides the skating-rink and the ski-ing ground, and there was a reading and recreation room where the elderly people sat playing chess.

The Park was very large and beautifully laid out. Wide avenues with statues gave vistas reminiscent of Versailles, but the gay little kiosks and simple wooden constructions were wholly Soviet.

Ludmilla and Sasha made straight for the skating-rink, where they put on their skating-boots, and in a few seconds were gliding blissfully over the ice. It was pleasant to see so many young people enjoying themselves. Some were expert skaters who casually performed the most intricate figures. A few were still in the awkward stages of just learning to skate. But most of the people on the ice were content to strike out boldly to left and right

in merry groups of twos and threes, or to waltz with the one person of their choice. They were all trimly dressed in good sports clothes, or skating-tights and skirts with short fur jackets, with bright woollen scarves floating out behind them as they skated. Clothes had improved noticeably in the last year.

The brass band burst into a Tchaikovsky waltz as Sasha took Ludmilla's hand and whirled her off. They both adored skating. Ludmilla, who was good at all sports, excelled on skates, and Sasha was surprisingly agile for



one of his size. Ludmilla's brief blue skating-dress swirled gracefully with every movement, and her gay red stocking-cap swung its bobble to left and to right like a rudder. Lots of her factory mates were also out skating, and they received endless smiles and waves as they whizzed past.

Time went quickly. Presently, in between two waltzes, they made for the buffet to drink tea. It was crowded and everyone was talking at the same time. Sasha lifted a glass of steaming tea high over the heads of the crowd and carefully lowered it into Ludmilla's hands.

"Well, for goodness sake!" exclaimed a husky voice just behind them. Ludmilla turned round to find Jane Brett with one skating-boot on and the other in her hand, struggling with a bootlace. They greeted each other

enthusiastically. Jane, an old friend of Boris, was always sure of a welcome with the Pavlov family.

"I've just gotten back from an assignment in the South. Had to do a spread on Collective Farms in the Caucasus. Gosh, it's cold in Moscow. How are you making out, Ludmilla?" said Jane, beaming.

"You must come back with us to Arbat," cried Sasha, shaking her hand vigorously. "It's our wedding party. Please come and drink to our happiness."

"Why I'd love to—congratulations! Only thing is I've got a dinner date already—with an Englishwoman—a Miss Parker. She's been a governess or something here since the days of Catherine the Great, I guess."

"Why don't you bring your Miss Parker along too?" suggested Ludmilla.

"Sure—that's a swell idea. I will too," cried Jane, plucking at her boot-lace so violently that it broke in two, causing her to lose her balance and stumble backwards.

Sasha conducted Jane to a wooden seat where he expertly repaired the broken lace. Jane's ineptness at such things was as much a part of her character as her absurd little hats and her turtle-necked sweaters.

Jane Brett, newspaper-woman, was one of the permanent characters of the foreign colony, though she had taken Russia so utterly to her heart that she hated to be thought part of the foreign colony at all.

She was big and plump, with a rosy good-natured face and a mop of glorious red hair. She was hard-working, extremely loyal, and very absent-minded. She had countless friends, and as far as anyone knew, no enemies at all. She spoke a fluent Russian full of quite extraordinary mistakes in grammar, pronunciation and idiom, and wrote endless reports in racy English for the *Moscow Daily News* on Infant Welfare in Moscow, Sugar-beet production in the Ukraine, Collective Farming in the Caucasus, and whatever subject cropped up.

Like many other Americans, Jane Brett had first come to Russia out of curiosity and had stayed on because she liked it. In her five years' residence she had become more Russian than the Russians and yet remained startlingly American. She lived somewhere on Pokrovka, smoked continuously, and had serious intentions of one day writing the great American novel.

Dusk was already enveloping Moscow in a blue haze as they tucked their skates under their arms and made for the Metro. Everyone in Moscow was proud of the new Metro, but the enthusiasm of Jane was greatest of all.

Though her route lay in a different direction and she was already late for her appointment with Miss Parker, Jane could not resist the temptation

to have another look at the glories of the Metro. She accompanied Ludmilla and Sasha down the handsome staircase to the palatial platform, and insisted on seeing them into their train.

Promising to turn up at the party quite soon with her friend, Jane waved them off as hospitably as from her own doorstep. Then she turned round and made her way leisurely to the other end of Moscow, where Miss Ethel Parker shared a modest flat with another teacher.

She was over an hour late for her appointment with Miss Parker, but Miss Parker, who had lived in Russia for more than twenty-five years, was accustomed to waiting and being by nature a methodical person, made a practice of employing the time to deal with her correspondence. Miss Parker was in fact writing her fifth letter (to her younger sister in Ealing) when Jane thumped on the door. Miss Parker rose from her straight-backed chair and went calmly to open the door to her impetuous friend.

Miss Parker was a tall thin lady, always neatly dressed in grey, with a prim face and twinkling eyes. She was one of those English spinsters who either spend their whole lives in their Sussex garden or else are to be found travelling in remote parts of the world. It is certain that Miss Parker would have bestowed upon her primulas precisely the same quiet attention she gave to her Russian adventures.

If ever anyone could have written a really interesting book about Russia before, during and after the Revolution, that person was Miss Parker. But Miss Parker, busy with her tutorial work, never dreamed of such a thing. It was only occasionally and unintentionally that she let slip a phrase or uttered a remark which revealed how much she had seen. Jane, whose greatest regret in life was that she had not been in Russia in 1917, was continually trying to draw Miss Parker out, but Miss Parker's restrained recollections, recast in Jane's exaggerated prose, never sounded at all convincing.

Miss Parker had been governess to the daughters of a Polish aristocrat before 1900 : had taught the daughters of Russian nobility the elements of English prosody before 1910 ; had been book-keeper in a Russian flour-mill in the Moscow province in 1917. She had watched the tempestuous drama of the Revolution develop around her, as it were from a seat in the stalls, and had taken it all in as calmly and objectively as she did everything else. She was not a woman of strong passions but rather an annotator of life. Now she was busy teaching the elements of English prosody to a new generation of Russians—chiefly young factory-workers and Red Army men.

Her room was staid and neat, and despite the porcelain stove in the corner somehow contrived to look very English. Miss Parker had none of the Russian love for display and though she possessed beautiful embroideries and fine silver ornaments (for she had accumulated many presents

from former days) she kept them packed away and regarded them chiefly as an encumbrance.

Always busy, never hurried, punctual as a clock despite a quarter of a century's residence in Russia, Miss Parker presented to the world an unruffled calm. She liked teaching and imparted to her pupils an impeccably middle-class English articulation, so that it was easy to pick out Miss Parker's pupils wherever English was spoken in Moscow. Most of the other teachers of English were young Americans whose Russian pupils, with the careful ear of a musical race, reproduced their teachers' Chicago accents exactly.

Jane Brett flooded into the room, dropping skates, mittens and scarf about the floor. Breezily she announced to Miss Parker that instead of dinner as originally planned she proposed to take her to a Soviet wedding party.

Miss Parker concealed her feelings at the prospect of being cheated of her quiet evening at home, and politely said she'd be delighted to come. Long experience of Russian cooking of every kind, from the sumptuous banquets of the pre-revolutionary nobility to the cabbage-soup-and-salt-herring peasant diet, and latterly the ample communal restaurant menus, only intensified in her the determination to eat at least one English dinner each week. Rest-day was the chosen day for this ritual. She had already prepared (from very dissimilar Russian ingredients) a dinner of roast mutton, boiled potatoes and sprouts, to be followed by a plain rice pudding.

Never mind . . . it would do next day. She was too familiar with Russian parties to suggest dining first and then going on afterwards, for she knew very well that there would be mountains of luscious food which would have to be consumed down to the last morsel if her host was not to be offended.

Miss Parker's Rest-day dinners were a cosy feature of her life. She was careful never to invite more than one guest—usually a pupil. In Moscow Miss Parker's brussels sprouts were regarded by her pupils as a mysteriously exotic dish. They felt England to be a small but stalwart nation composed of 40,000,000 people all like Miss Parker or the male counterpart of Miss Parker, and they thought reverently of their literary heroes, Dickens and Shakespeare, producing their masterpieces on a steady diet of brussels sprouts. One or two daring spirits among her pupils had even tried cooking sprouts themselves. But the dish always turned into something rich and strange and Russian and ended by being served with sour cream.

Miss Parker put away her writing-case, put on her winter coat and hat and her lady-like galoshes, and plunged into the night with Jane Brett.

"Isn't this just the swellest Pullman!" cried Jane as they sat at ease in a carriage of the Metro rapidly rushing towards Arbat.

"It is most comfortable," agreed Miss Parker mildly. Her own memories

of Russian transport would have supplied Jane with enough copy for a dozen novels, but she said no more than that. Miss Parker had in fact been conveyed across primitive tracks in the ornate sleighs of the aristocracy drawn by spirited ponies. She had known trams even more crowded than the present-day trams, and exhilarating free railway journeys in unheated trains during the early days of the Revolution.

At Arbat they got out. Like most of Moscow this place was a strange mixture of old and new. Huge modern buildings of reinforced concrete



overshadowed little stucco churches whose clusters of gold domes shone out like bubbles against the night sky.

The Vassiliev family did not live in a modern flat. Not yet, that is. They were promised one in a block of apartments in process of being built. Meanwhile they continued to live like good-natured sardines in their present flat.

Jane Brett threaded her way through a tangle of narrow streets until she found a wooden door with the right number above it. They stepped through this doorway into a small dark courtyard and proceeded to climb up two flights of shabby wooden stairs. As it was Rest-day everyone was



entertaining, and the two most recent Soviet foxtrots reverberated from many different flats.

Ludmilla flew to the door to greet her guests, piling their outdoor clothes on to the heap which already more than filled the tiny hall, and ushered them gaily into the living-room. It was quite a small room, crammed with guests and relatives. The Vassilievs were a numerous family, so full of life and high spirits that they appeared to be twice as many as they were, and they flooded their little flat like an avalanche.

An immense buffet took up one whole wall. Here were spread temptingly dozens of dishes of succulent cold meats and fishes, red caviar, black caviar, cucumber salad, cranberry salad, beetroot salad, mushroom salad, and every known variety of salad except that particular salad *we* call Russian salad, which was not to be found anywhere in Moscow except in such hotels as tried to cater for English tourists. There were fine cheeses and bowls of glowing fruit, and an enormous decorated iced-cake which bore adequate testimony to the survival of the art of the pastrycook in all its Romanov glory. There were boxes of fancy chocolates and sweets wrapped in tinfoil papers. There were great piles of rye bread on platters, elegant spiced bread on linen napkins, white wheaten loaves cunningly plaited and varnished, and sweet cakes baked in fanciful shapes of swans and troikas. To drink there was red wine from the Caucasus, white wine from the Crimea, *l ager* beer brewed near Moscow, vodka (in moderation) and, as a special treat, several bottles of the newly-marketed Soviet champagne.

Jane introduced her friend, whereupon Miss Parker was ceremoniously presented to all the guests in turn. Miss Parker spoke a correct rather old-fashioned Russian. Everyone settled down again to the first item of the evening which was the buffet.

Miss Parker, politely accepting the rich foods pressed upon her, cast one lingering thought back to her simple little English dinner at home. Then resolutely she seized a knife and fork and proceeded to tackle what was on her plate. Jane Brett was already taking a second helping of *kolbassa*.

As fast as one dish was emptied Mamma Vassilieva appeared from nowhere with replenishments. Papa Vassiliev was enjoying himself. He loved dispensing hospitality and a wedding in the family gave him an admirable opportunity. He presided over the drinks, toasting each guest in turn with much amiability and an astonishing flow of appropriate sentiments.

Grisha, a smile lighting up his dark face, began to unfasten his accordion, and struck up the Song of the Steppes. The party settled down to its second stage—music. Presently the crisp twanging of two guitars was added to Grisha's drawn-out chords. One of the players was Oleg Kravchenko, the doctor's husband. The music followed a well-worn pattern. First they

played a series of rousing Red Army marches, passing gradually into pleasantly monotonous peasant ditties, in which everyone joined in the choruses and one guest after another added a verse according to his own fancy. Grisha took a long drink and settled himself down more comfortably. Next there would be the sweet sad songs that they all sang together, lingering blissfully on the minor cadences.

Meanwhile the guests were mingling amongst themselves, and those who didn't know each other before were getting friendly. Boris, for instance, had taken an immense fancy to Miss Parker. A connoisseur of people, he had remarked immediately that she was a good vintage. They were talking together quietly in a corner—of London and English primroses and the flower-sellers of Piccadilly Circus. Jane Brett was making a speech in execrable Russian in compliment to the bride and bridegroom who stood beside her, laughing and blushing. Professor Borodin was drinking with Papa Vassiliev and saucy-faced Petka was fussing round Madame Borodina with a bottle of vodka. He sensed that she was feeling ill to-night and could think of no other stimulant.

Ludmilla, looking round the packed room, took it all in with bright eyes. This was indeed the real beginning of everything. She wanted to form a picture she could keep in her memory for always.

She saw, distinct in the blur of forms and laughing faces, her Sasha looking immensely tall and strong and not a little awkward in his best suit cut on European lines, with a real collar and tie. Papa Vassiliev however, was not to be enticed from his Russian shirt. To-night he was wearing a beautifully embroidered one in honour of the occasion. There was Mamma Pavlova in her best black dress with her gold watch, and Polina in her white muslin dress, and all the Vassiliev children in their best clothes. Ludmilla glanced with satisfaction at her own frock. It was a new one, of dark blue silk. It was short, with long sleeves and a pretty embroidered collar. Round her neck she wore her mother's gift of the gold locket.

Boris, returning from Europe, had once brought her a French fashion magazine, and she had been astonished at the emaciated lines of the fashionable ladies in trailing evening gowns. She thought the ladies looked consumptive and that such long clothes must be very difficult to manage. She much preferred her blue silk. She knew it was good quality, that it fitted her and had dignity. Ludmilla liked clothes and was proud of her elegant shoes with high heels, which were the latest product of a new Soviet shoe factory.

There was now an interlude in the singing and Mamma Vassilieva brought in an enormous samovar. Following her came the two elder Vassiliev girls carrying large trays of sweets and glass saucers of jam. The

party was entering its third stage. The time had now come for individual efforts.

As soon as all the guests were supplied with glasses of tea and sweets, Lyuba Vassilieva, Sasha's eldest sister, a vivacious girl of eighteen, sang a sentimental song in a clear soprano voice. Then a sailor guest, on leave from the Red Fleet base at Kronstadt, danced a lively hornpipe. He was followed by Papa Vassiliev, who recited a long poem with dramatic gestures about the Revolt of 1904 and revolutionaries dying in the snow on their way to exile in Siberia. Everyone listened intently.



Now it was Sasha's turn. He did a weight-lifting act, long popular as a gymnastic exercise in the Vassiliev family. It consisted of all the Vassiliev children grouping themselves in tiers on recumbent Sasha, who gradually rose to his knees, then to his feet, lifting them all with him, the youngest Vassiliev, a boy of four, triumphantly waving a little flag at the apex of the pyramid, bending his head to avoid colliding with the ceiling.

"Bravo!" cried all the guests, as the group broke up into its eight individual Vassilievs.

Then Ludmilla sang a song. It was one of Pushkin's, and pleased everybody. Now it was Boris's turn.

Boris did a wicked burlesque of a Caucasian *émigré* dancing in a Paris night-club . . . ogling the ladies, throwing knives wildly with his

teeth, and finishing up with a rush to collect *pource-boires*.

Jane Brett followed with an American Hobo song, which she sang in a husky drawl.

"Halleluia, I'm a bum;  
Halleluia, bum again;  
Halleluia, give us a hand-out  
To revive us again.

O the springtime has come  
And I'm just out of jail,  
So I'll pick up my bucket  
And go on the bum.

Halleluia, I'm a bum ;  
Halleluia, bum again ;  
Halleluia, give us a hand-out  
To revive us again.

O I went to a lady and knocked at her door  
But she only said Bumbum, you've been here before. . . ."

By the time she had reached

"O why don't you work like other folk do ?  
How the hell can I work when there's no work to do ?"

the guests were joining heartily in the chorus, with such improvised harmonizing of their own as to Russianize it completely.

Everyone now looked expectantly at Miss Parker, who obligingly stepped into the middle of the circle and recited in her crisp English voice Polonius' advice to Laertes, enchanting her audience, who knew their Shakespeare and had often listened to this oration delivered in sonorous Russian at the Vachtangov Theatre.

" . . . Give thy thoughts no tongue,  
Nor any unproportion'd thought his act.  
Be thou familiar, but by no means vulgar.  
The friends thou hast, and their adoption tried,  
Grapple them to thy soul with hoops of steel ;  
But do not dull thy palm with entertainment  
Of each new-hatch'd, unfledg'd comrade. Beware  
Of entrance to a quarrel ; but, being in,  
Bear't, that th' opposed may beware of thee.  
Give every man thine ear, but few thy voice :  
Take each man's censure, but reserve thy judgment.  
Costly thy habit as thy purse can buy,  
But not express'd in fancy ; rich, not gaudy :  
For the apparel oft proclaims the man ;  
And they in France, of the best rank and station,  
Are most select and generous, chief in that.  
Neither a borrower, nor a lender be :  
For loan oft loses both itself and friend ;  
And borrowing dulls the edge of husbandry.  
This, above all,—to thine ownself be true ;  
And it must follow, as the night the day,  
Thou canst not then be false to any man."

Miss Parker gave a slight bow and retired to her seat amid loud applause. Everyone liked her contribution. It was, they all felt, neatly done and appropriate to her profession and the occasion.

Sasha gently pulled his mother forward. Grisha struck up a Ukrainian dance-tune and Mamma Vassilieva rather shyly took the floor. In a moment she was stepping nimbly round the tiny space available, her white

apron floating from side to side. Mamma Pavlova thrust a flowered print kerchief into her hands. The music quickened. The guests began to clap rhythmically. Mamma Vassilieva waved the kerchief round her head, feet pattering faster and faster in a dizzy circle into which she coaxed one guest after another until the room was filled with whirling figures and clicking heels. The music ended abruptly on a loud chord and everyone subsided, laughing and breathing quickly.

Now it was Doctor Kravchenko's turn to dance. She glided into the circle, dressed in her native robes. Her silken gown was woven in stripes of magenta gold and green, which shimmered like a beetle's wing. On her naked feet were small embroidered slippers and on her head was a saucy embroidered cap. She seemed to bring a different atmosphere into the room, a completely Eastern World of fierce sunshine, tea-houses and veiled women.

Her dance was in complete contrast to the one before. With slow languorous movements of the body, hardly lifting her feet from the ground, she gracefully extended her arms and fluttered her ten fingers like captive birds. Then extending her hands horizontally so that her glowing eyes peered between them, she subtly articulated the muscles of her neck, sliding her head from side to side as a bird does.

"How primitive is the Western world after all," thought Boris, watching her with admiration and respect. "A race which can control the body to such a degree as this could perform miracles with the scientific equipment of the Western world. It will come."

The dance was over. It ended inconclusively in a liquefying movement of the whole body. Her arms drooped, her neck relaxed, and she became Doctor Kravchenko once more.

And now it was Petka's turn. He took the floor with his impudent smile and announced he was going to do a balancing trick. This he did indeed, poising a glass dish endways on top of a ferrule, and a wineglass on top of that and a porcelain plate on top of that, all crazily perched on his left hand. Then with his right hand he rapidly twisted a huge paper cone, which he set on fire by holding a match between his teeth and grating it against his jacket. He raised the whole structure to his forehead where he balanced it apparently with ease. With a flick of one hand he then switched off the electric light and in darkness, lit only by the blazing cone, he spun round and round like a top.

The party broke up at last. Everyone was tired, happy and full of sentiment as they plodded off in twos and threes through the snow, snuggling their noses deep into their heavy fur collars.

In a chattering group the Pavlovs, the Kravchenkos and the Borodins

made for the Moscow river and Boulevard Serpuchovka. Boris picked up a belated sleigh on the way, into which he ceremoniously handed the bride and bridegroom and the older people, and away they dashed, bells jingling loudly in the cold silent air.

Grisha, who was soon leaving for the Far East to rejoin his regiment, had given up his tiny room to the newly-married couple. Until his departure he would sleep on the ottoman in the sitting-room. Sasha was coming to live with the Pavlovs now. He and Ludmilla had no bridal suite, nor honeymoon, nor anything like that. To-morrow was an ordinary working day.

Grisha's room, when they entered it, had been scrupulously cleaned and put in order. There were snowy embroidered linen sheets on the bed and fresh covers everywhere from Mamma Pavlova's wooden linen chest. On the table was an earthenware jug filled with flowers from Boris, and beside it a lacquered tray heaped with *kishmish* (Asiatic sweetmeats) which Doctor Kravchenko had prepared as a special gift.

They had work, love, friends. What more could anyone desire? They clasped hands in silence.



### III

## *Talk*

THE Borodin family, however, did not go home to bed. Elated by the party and in an expansive mood they took several of the guests back with them, where they gathered in the Borodin sitting-room and sat up half the night talking and drinking tea.

There was Doctor Kravchenko and Oleg her husband, Grisha, Jane Brett and Miss Parker, who, resigned to a real Russian evening, saw no reason for not continuing it.

Professor Borodin hustled a protesting Madame Borodina to bed. Petka made her a special drink of hot spiced wine, which Boris brought to her bedside. As soon as she was asleep Boris rejoined the party in the sitting-room where Petka was already handing round glasses of tea.

Exactly the same size and shape as the Pavlov sitting-room, the Borodin sitting-room had a totally different flavour. It looked, as indeed it was, a sort of museum. It was crammed with paintings and potteries, wood carvings, woven rugs and embroideries from all four corners of the Soviet Union, lined with shelves of monumental books and littered with MSS. No one was allowed to touch the Professor's papers, but Madame Borodina had over a period of years worked out a scheme for keeping open certain narrow channels through the learned chaos which might be dusted and kept reasonably tidy. Petka loved the sitting-room with its scholarly muddle, and never tired of wandering about, hands obediently tucked into his pockets, feasting his eyes on all the treasures.

It was Boris who had introduced Petka into his parents' household. It had happened like this.

Boris was travelling by train south to Odessa in 1925 on an urgent assignment for his newspaper. Conditions were then still unsettled after the years of civil war following the 1917 revolution and the famine of 1920, and there were plenty of thieves and vagabonds about.

Undressing for the night, Boris took the precaution of putting his boots under his pillow before he turned in. Lulled by the pounding rhythm of the train, he was just reading himself to sleep when he observed a grimy little hand stealthily reaching towards his boots. Boris waited until the hand had actually fastened itself on to his boots. He seized it firmly by the wrist and pulled a small dirty boy from under his bunk.



The boy grinned impudently and made a sudden dive to escape, but Boris tripped him up and pulled him back by his jacket, which was a cut-down Red Army great-coat, indescribably filthy and patched all over. The boy changed his tactics, squeezed out a few tears and began to whine for kopeks. Boris lit a cigarette and waited.

Presently he asked :

"What's your name, lad?"

"Petka," answered the dirty little boy.

"What's your surname?"

"Don't know."

"Age?"

Petka answered with a shrug.

"Parents?"

"Got none."

"Can you read and write?"

Petka spat contemptuously.

"Where are you making for on this train?"

"Our gang is heading south for the winter."

"Why?"

"We've no warm coats and then, you know, business is better in the south," and Petka made a sly gesture as of one stealing a purse from a pocket.

Petka's attention wandered. He was rapidly turning over in his mind how to get away quick. He knew there was a G.P.U. official on the train trying to round them up and he wasn't taking any risks.

"See here, Mister," he began cajolingly—

"Keep your boots. I'll beat it. Only give me a cigarette, I'm dying for a smoke."

But at that moment Petka caught sight of the book Boris was still holding in his hand. It was open at an illustrated page. Petka was fascinated by the drawing.

"Who made that?" he demanded.

"Kukriniksi . . . it's good, isn't it?"

"It's wonderful. I wish I could make pictures like that," said Petka, with real longing in his voice.

"Well, why not? I know this artist. It's three artists really. They all work together. They are great friends. They often come to our house to talk with my father."

Petka sat down impulsively.

"I'd give my right hand to learn to draw. I mess about when I can steal a pencil or a bit of paper. I've so many pictures in my head, millions. My gang is one of the cleverest of all the gangs," he went on,

pushing his chest out boastfully, "besides being the smartest thieves on this line."

Boris had already caught sight of the G.P.U. official outside the door. Behind Petka's back he motioned him to wait.

"Petka, if I were to take you to Moscow and see you got the opportunity to draw, would you give up this hooligan life?"

"What, me? Go to school and wash every day?" cried Petka indignantly.

"Why not?"

"I'm no cissie."

"Neither am I," said Boris quietly. He pointed to the scar on his cheek. "I got that fighting against Kolchak in Siberia . . . it was so cold and we used to get so fed up that sometimes we lay under the lorries to drink the petrol for want of other alcohol. Yet I study and I wash every day."

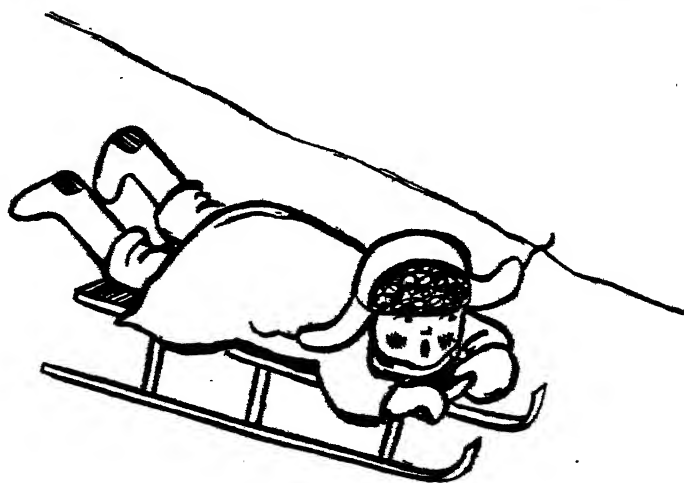
Petka was intrigued by this argument. But all the same he glanced distrustfully round the compartment. Then he spotted the G.P.U. official and made a wild dive for the opposite door. Boris caught him as the G.P.U. man pushed open the door and entered the compartment.

"No use, son," said the G.P.U. man with a kindly grin, "we've rounded up the lot."

"No you haven't," answered Petka, red with anger. "You've never got Afonka . . . nobody could catch Afonka. He's faster than lightning."

"Oh yes we have," replied the G.P.U. man pleasantly. "We've got Afonka too. And you're all coming to Bolshevo with me."

"Look here. I'm interested in this lad," said Boris, showing his journalist's



credentials to the G.P.U. official, "I'll come along and see him there as soon as I get back."

The official saluted and withdrew, taking the squirming Petka with him.

It was at Bolshevo that Boris next saw Petka—an amazingly clean Petka dressed in decent warm clothes. He was working in the toolshop and greeted Boris with a self-conscious grin.

"Like it here?" asked Boris.

"Well, I'd run away, I think, if only they'd bolt the doors and windows."

"Eat well?"

"Not half!"

"Learning something?"

"Well, what if I am?"

Boris took him home on parole for a few days. Petka was impressed with the flat and its contents and listened intently to everything Professor Borodin could tell him, expressing his appreciation of pictures by strings of wild oaths. Madame Borodina plied him with food. His table manners were still unspeakable. Yet they warmed to each other.

It was the first of many visits. The way to Petka's heart, they soon discovered, was crayons and paper. Floods of drawings poured from him as from an active volcano. Crude powerful drawings they were, of street fights, beggars gathered round murky fires in cellars, sudden death at street corners. Professor Borodin invited artist friends to drop in and meet Petka, and presently he arranged for him to take lessons from one of the best artists in Moscow. He studied the old masters, and found he most appreciated El Greco and Daumier.

Petka learned to draw more accurately, yet his teacher was careful to avoid subduing his sharp cynical genius.

"He will be a satirist," was his final comment. "He knows too much to be anything else."

Bolshevo had made a man of him, and when the Borodins took him over entirely a few months later he was a different being altogether from the dirty little hooligan of Boris's first encounter.

Yet the past had left its traces. For several years, during the most impressionable part of his childhood, Petka had lived a wild vagabond life, dependent for the barest necessities upon thieving and worse, and subject to no laws save the gang's own rough justice. He had alternated between starving (often) and gorging (occasionally), gambling and drinking habitually. As a result of all this he was very tough without being very strong; he was cunning and suspicious as a fox, and he seemed to have a sixth sense which enabled him to see through people and uncover their motives.

Long after the Borodins had officially adopted him he still swore terribly.

especially when he was angry or emotionally moved. He delighted in stealing things from under Madame Borodina's very nose, triumphantly handing them back to her before their loss had been discovered, for he took a certain pride in his dexterity as a thief and explained to Boris that he had to keep his hand in.

"Well, well," said Boris, delighted by his protégé. "You know what Maxim Gorki says. 'No knowledge is useless.'"

At Bolshevo Petka had developed a second passion. He had become very interested in model airplanes and aviation construction. So that when Doctor Kravchenko's husband, who was an airplane designer, suggested taking him on as apprentice, Petka snapped at the offer like a trout at a fly. At the airplane factory Petka learned even more than at Bolshevo. In particular he was impressed by Kravchenko's modesty and single-mindedness. Petka was intelligent and could work hard when he liked. And this time he did like. So that he soon became qualified enough to work directly under Kravchenko himself who was chief designer there.

Kravchenko and Petka, so dissimilar, got along famously, and most nights were to be found poring over blue-prints either in the Borodin sitting-room or in the Kravchenko sitting-room next door.

Kravchenko was delighted with the lad's bold approach to technical problems and expected great things from him, though he encouraged him mainly by criticism, for he guessed that Petka's vanity needed working out.

This then was Petka, handing round glasses of tea with the ease and assurance of a real son of the house.

Doctor Kravchenko settled herself gracefully in a corner seat. Kravchenko had slipped across to their own flat to see all was well. It was. This evening their occasional country help, Agasha, had come along to give a hand. Agasha and Leonid were both sound asleep when Kravchenko tiptoed in. He returned to the Borodin's humming absent-mindedly. His mind, in those few seconds, had already flown to the invention he was working on—a new anti-freezing device specially designed for Arctic flying. He re-entered the Borodin sitting-room as Boris was telling his guests of the gathering political tension in France.

"There is a bad smell in Paris," said Boris, tapping his glass, "Blum is extinct. Only the evil forces are active . . . Bonnet, Laval, Flandin. This Maginot line fetish will lead to no good, and it won't be the workers' fault. No soldiers are braver than the French, but an army must be properly led to prevail. I fear for France when the blow falls. The cultural movement is lively enough but political life is rotten to the core. There is hardly a newspaper in France you couldn't buy for a few thousand francs, and the French people know it."

"I've always had a tender spot for France," remarked Doctor Krav-

chenko. "The French understand coloured people better than most Europeans."

"And, of course, they have always appreciated their art," put in Professor Borodin, reaching out for an elegant volume on the crowded bookshelf. "See this admirable French monograph on West African sculpture. The vitality of the original cubist movement in Paris came directly from Negro sources, but it petered out in the tired hands of Jean Cocteau; and the Sur-réaliste movement, of course, never attempted to touch real life at all—it was the simplest retreat from reality. Cocteau could draw wonderfully well, but all he cared to draw was night-club stuff, brothels, and the delirious visions of the morphiniste, in fact society in decadence. He reflects most faithfully a tired ruling class seeking escape in supposed exotics."

"Not only the ruling class either," put in Jane, lighting another cigarette. "You have no idea what a kick we middle-class westerners get out of the glamorous East. You should see our coloured magazine advertisements for steamship sailings to Bali. If Russia were only a matter of samovars and painted Easter eggs now. I was as crazy as any tourist at the New Moscow Hotel when I first came out. I rushed about buying *roubashkas* and Caucasian daggers as though that was all there was to it."

"If Europeans only knew the background of these exotics," said Doctor Kravchenko with a touch of bitterness. "Right up to 1930 my native Uzbekistan was desperately backward. When Europeans admire my embroidered Uzbek cap do they realise, I wonder, that from a tender age Uzbek girls were condemned never to appear in public without wearing the *paranchah*, which was a bag covering them from head to foot, made of black horse-hair and of course, never washed. Do they know that we were married off when young children to men we had never seen. My eldest sister was physically wrecked as a result of this child marriage. My cousin, Kholinisa, who was one of the pioneers of women's emancipation in Uzbekistan, gave up her life for the new freedom the Revolution brought. She was set alight with kerosene and burned alive in the public square as an example to other women who wished to throw off the veil. Reaction isn't conquered so easily, and its dying fangs are the most venomous of all. To-day, when I see our young Uzbek girls striding along so confidently in sports demonstrations, I cannot forget these things."

"We in England had considerable difficulty over the question of female emancipation," observed Miss Parker somewhat diffidently. "In the struggle to obtain the vote, leading English suffragettes chained themselves to railings. One suffragette even flung herself to death before the horses' hooves on a public race-course in an attempt to give publicity to the demands of the suffragettes. Doubtless you have heard of their hunger-strikes in gaol and how the prison authorities in some cases resorted to forcible feeding."

Unfortunately the movement was largely in the hands of a few educated middle-class women. The Great War brought emancipation, for women were badly needed to help the war effort. I fear the full power and responsibility of the vote has not yet been fully understood by the majority of my countrywomen, however, or perhaps it would be fairer to say that in England generally politics seem less important than they do here."

"The girls in our gang always went equal shares with us," put in Petka. "They did their share of the dirty work all right, but they got their fair share of the pickings afterwards. And a good tough lot they were too,"



he went on, slapping his thigh appreciatively. Varya now, she was a rip if you like . . . almost quicker than Afonka she was at work, and handy with a knife. I have never seen her equal with a knife. She gambled harder than any of us and swore so you couldn't believe your own ears. She would have been the next leader of our gang if . . ."

"Is it not an undoubted fact," remarked Professor Borodin, in his platform manner, "that where the women have useful tasks to perform they cannot be kept down nor can they be treated merely as decorative chattels. In primitive communities the women usually receive reasonably fair treatment. In China it was not the custom to bind the feet of those women destined, for instance, to work in the fields. In many African tribes women occupy a distinct position in society by virtue of their capacity to work. It is

generally in the older, more decadent civilizations that the better-class women are worse off."

"We've got plenty of sex equality in America," said Jane. "But to my way of thinking there's more sex than equality to it. I guess we American women spend more money than any other women in the world chasing glamour in beauty parlours. Life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness. Well, that's what we fought for in 1772. . . . We can get good relationships with our men sometimes, at college and on the job maybe. But you have to remember too that America is the land of sugar-daddies and burlesque shows. Personally I don't think that strip-tease is all that much of an advance on *paranchas*."

"It takes time to get women squarely on their feet," said Boris, lighting a new cigarette from the charred remains of his old one. "I remember when we were opening up in Siberia, as late as 1930 there were still remnants of Kolchak's men we thought we had finished off in 1921, but some had survived and managed to wriggle themselves into our new industries where they did a lot of wrecking before we were able to weed them out. Our young workers there were all right. Imagine working night and day erecting a concrete bridge in forty-five degrees of frost. One of the best of the men on the job I remember was a young Kirghizian named Ali-Mukhanov. He was a good worker and extremely intelligent. He learned fast and won promotion after promotion, until he was finally awarded a fine new house (and you can imagine the scarcity of living-quarters at that place at that time). Well, naturally, he was delighted. In he moved right away with his six kids and Kirghiz wife. She insisted on pitching their *Kibitka* (nomad tent) inside the living-room. It took up the whole floor space with the exception of the four corners, which she piled high with hay, brushwood and groundsel. The kitchen she used for a rabbit hutch. However, the House Committee stepped in when she started making fires on the living-room floor in the middle of the *Kibitka*. So she began to yearn for her free open-air life on the steppes again . . . this just as the autumn rains were setting in. 'Brother,' Ali-Mukhanov used to say to me, 'in my house I feel like a lodger. It's only on the building site that I am really at home. The work-brigade is my family.' To-day, very likely, those children of his are university graduates. In one clay peasant hut there I remember counting thirty-nine ikons of miracle workers on the wall: when I turned one over I found swarming nests of bugs behind it crawling all over the walls. And this at Magnitogorsk in 1930 where we were opening up the world's most modern industrial plants. The point is that progress isn't easy and never uniform."

"Superstition isn't altogether confined to the peasantry," observed Miss Parker mildly. "When I was first in Russia I came out to be governess to

the daughters of a noble family in Byelo-Russia. The old Countess was suddenly taken ill once with a malignant fever and they called in the local witch-doctor. She was an illiterate old crone, indescribably filthy and hung about with amulets and bones. The entire household was ordered to assemble in the Countess's bedroom to witness the exorcising of the fever. The Count and his sons were out hunting as usual. We never saw them any day until dinner. However, the four cooks, the eighteen maidservants, the grooms and lacqueys all came and stood around her great wooden bed. Actually it looked rather more like a throne. The old Countess, white as a sheet, was propped up on satin cushions wearing all her magnificent jewellery. Then the witch-doctor started shuffling round the bed in a hysterical kind of dance, chanting incantations. Finally, she hung a dirty amulet round the Countess's neck, and spat into her mouth. This concluded the treatment and we were allowed to leave the room.

"Did she recover?" asked Grisha.

"She did," replied Miss Parker primly. "You see, she had the constitution of an ox, and as she stayed in bed for several weeks and drank quantities of vodka, that may have had something to do with the cure. I have always suspected it was malaria. Her estates were built on a swamp."

"And what did the little governess fresh from England think of our nice beautiful Slav culture?" asked Boris.

"Oh you know . . . when in Rome . . ." returned Miss Parker, with a ghost of a twinkle in her eye. "I had my own medicine-chest with me, of course, and a good stock of quinine, but the Countess's superstitions were really none of my business. As a matter of fact I almost took up missionary work before deciding on teaching, and during that period I studied medicine for two years. I have often found it useful." And Miss Parker, feeling she had been talking too much, sipped at her tea and melted into silence again.

But Grisha was fascinated.

"Tell us more Miss Parker," he begged. "I'm so curious about England. All I know is that we buy our best machinery from you, and we send our best engineers to Metro-Vickers to study how it is made, and I know that England is a tiny island. But is it true that it is always full of fog? I've read translations of Shakespeare and Dickens and Galsworthy, but they all give such entirely different pictures. I like Dickens best, I think, but Shakespeare is grand . . . like Beethoven somehow."

"Shakespeare was a country lad," said Miss Parker. "He gives the real English countryside, at least as it used to be. I'm afraid motor-cars and cheap housing estates have encroached on his idyll—or so my sister writes. You see, I haven't been home since 1910."

"England is a sweet sleepy old place," cried Jane who had a soft spot for it. "It's so small you could walk right off the edge into the sea before



you knew what you were doing. The countryside is all parcelled out, hedged and cultivated like a garden flower-bed. Even the Lake District seems artificially cultivated. So many square miles of mountain set aside to look barren and picturesque like a backcloth at the opera. It's never very hot or very cold in England, but it rains almost all the time. People live in old-fashioned houses and burn coal in open grates, and no one gets excited about anything except Test Matches."

"London's the place," said Boris. "It's everything. It's a sprawling



old giant, dirty and confused, but full of wisdom. English people don't like to flaunt their wealth the way our nobility used to. It's a difference of temperament. In the West End of London you see old gentlemen at the bow-windows of their clubs looking as if they had been there for centuries, as indeed they have. Music is not important in England. Literature is important. Painting takes the form of periodic sensations in the daily press. Sport holds the first place. A Cup Tie or Derby Day will automatically push any political news from the front page. I love Fleet Street, but it's the industrial districts of Britain that are most interesting. Lancashire, the Black Country and South Wales, especially South Wales. Wonderful

men these Welsh miners, intelligent and tough. And as fond of music as we are."

Petka was busy filling everyone's glasses with tea.

"Tell me," asked Miss Parker quietly, as Petka took her glass. "What became of Varya?"

Petka grinned broadly. "She stayed two years at Bolshevo and learned all about manners and things. She's married. Got two kids already. She's a brigade leader on a sugar-beet farm in the Ukraine now. Just the job for Varya. No one will dare flout her authority. She'd make mincemeat of them. And do you know what happened to Afonka? He's a star trick cyclist in a travelling circus."

Miss Parker turned to the general conversation again. The thread of continuity was broken . . . she would catch it up again presently. Professor Borodin was saying, thoughtfully cracking with a beautiful embossed cracker of old silver a wedge of sugar-loaf to put in his tea, "The more the world extends communication the less we seem to spread real culture, it seems to me. It isn't enough to be able to fly across Europe in a day. What is important is what flies in the aeroplane. What are we exchanging? I understand that American films reach every village in Europe and many in Asia. What does this mean? That village girls in Bulgaria will be trying to dress their hair like Hollywood film stars? Better surely if they took over American plumbing. And what will the Indian native make of Greta Garbo? You see how well advised we are to filter our European imports. Our village girls can now have their hair permed if they wish to, and we provide them with handsome hairdressing establishments for that purpose. But first they learn to keep their hair clean. We've had enough typhus in Holy Russia to value cleanliness, haven't we, Doctor Kravchenko?"

"What is internationalized soonest," said Boris grimly, "is arms. The Nazis are smuggling their damned Krupps output into every country where they expect to create havoc when they are ready. Paris is full of concealed Nazi ammunition dumps tended by the Cagoulards. No one would make any money out of spreading Beethoven, for instance, and as for Heine . . . being a Jew he is officially cut off from Nazi recognition anyway."

"Rampant nationalism is like an unleashed dog with hydrophobia. Yet nationalism has been a great liberating influence in Europe in its proper day . . . a nation must obviously first be united in itself before it can join with other nations in international amity," remarked Professor Borodin.

"Old customs die hard," said Boris. "But the present-day political struggle goes on side by side with the customs of the past. I suppose because there has always been a class struggle in the history of every country. When I was in Japan, where, as you know, the working-class movement is most savagely repressed, I knew a young worker whose duty it was to organize

a meeting in his factory. To do such a thing meant certain death. Well, he got ready to go ; dressed himself in his traditional robes, took ceremonial leave of his family and made his obeisances to his ancestral gods. Then he rose and went calmly out to his meeting and his death."

"We Asiatics have much to learn from the Western world, my friends," said Doctor Kravchenko. "Speaking as a doctor I believe it is possible to wipe out much of the disease that has devitalized the East for so long. Wasn't it malaria that undermined Greek civilization?"

"Plus petty nationalism," smiled Professor Borodin. "You see how all these things interlock."

"There's no reason," went on Doctor Kravchenko, "why we shouldn't conquer malaria altogether, only it must be tackled on an epic scale. No individual schemes can be comprehensive enough. Malaria is a recurrent tropical fever caused by the bite of a mosquito which has previously bitten an infected person. We *can* clear our swamps and pools of malarial larvæ. It will take time and money, but it *can* be done. We are already doing much in that direction. In our new canals we breed a special fish which lives on the larvæ of the malaria-bearing mosquito, for instance. We can also spray these stretches of water by airplane with poisonous disinfectants to clear the larvæ out. Then there's typhus, which takes terrible toll in backward Asiatic countries, being a disease caused by dirt and undernourishment. There's smallpox and infantile paralysis and elephantiasis . . . all the malignant fevers and leprosy. There is no disease without its potential cure. And we shall find those cures with our great resources. We need time, money, patience. We have all those. Above all, we need co-operation in our work. That we have too. American plumbing is one of the essentials," said the doctor animatedly, "but it must be allied to Socialist application, or only a few wealthy people will benefit by it. Germs know no class barriers."

"Do you think cancer will be curable one day?" asked Jane.

"Why not?" replied Doctor Kravchenko, proceeding to explain the research work being undertaken in that direction.

The group of people gathered in Professor Borodin's untidy sitting-room, talking that night away, were typical of modern Russia. Especially were they typical in talking shop, in drinking in all they could learn. Boris most of all, for besides being Russian he had the true journalist's passion for specialized information about everything under the sun.

Petka, in obedience to a friendly sign from Professor Borodin, had slipped off to bed some time before.

It was getting on for breakfast-time.

"It's too late to go to bed now," said Doctor Kravchenko, with a gesture of the hand. "You shall all come over to our flat for breakfast. Agasha

will be delighted. She loves company, and I must say good morning to my son. Excuse me, please."

Within half an hour the guests, bathed and brushed, were reassembled round the table at number 310. Agasha, a rosy-faced peasant girl with a white kerchief tied over her tow hair, was cutting thick slices of rye-bread off an enormous loaf and handing round caviar, breakfast sausage, cheese and smoked fish. Doctor Kravchenko poured out tea with one hand and fed her son Leonid with the other. He was just learning to hold his mug of milk. He was a handsome child of one, an interesting racial mixture—



pure Uzbek on his mother's side, Russian, with some Volga-German and a touch of Napoleonic French, on his father's side. His hair was yellow as butter, silky-straight and cut in a tight fringe over his broad benign forehead. His skin was a tawny golden like his mother's but with rosy cheeks like a European child. His eyes were quite black, with smoothly hidden Asiatic lids. His lips were full, opulently curved, disclosing several strong white teeth.

He liked company as much as Agasha and amiably tried out his few words on the guests.

"Isn't he the cutest thing!" cried Jane.

"That's a fine lad," agreed Miss Parker.

Agasha was just unfastening his bib when Mamma Pavlova came in for him. He spent the day in her crèche and she always took him there when she went herself and brought him home again. Agasha quickly dressed him in his coat and bonnet of white lambskin, put on his fur gloves and felt boots and wrapped a crimson woollen scarf round and round his neck and over his mouth and chin. Doctor Kravchenko gave him a farewell kiss and his father tossed him up in the air. Then off he toddled, waving good-bye with his little hands.

Downstairs Mamma Pavlova put him on his sledge and off she plodded through the snow-laden gardens, hauling the sledge smoothly after her to the crèche at the extreme end of the block.

At half-past nine Doctor Kravchenko took leave of her guests and went off. She had a clinic at ten. Before she left the house however, she slipped back into flat 311 to see how Madame Borodina was feeling. The old lady was awake, sitting at the breakfast table with her husband and Boris, who was taking his ease in a comfortable kimono of light shantung.

Kravchenko came in with a pile of blue-prints under his arm to pick up Petka, who had finished breakfast and was struggling into his great-coat. Off they went to work, deep in a highly technical discussion about propellers.

Before she left the flat Doctor Kravchenko took the Professor aside for a moment and whispered "Don't let her do too much, dear friend. Her heart isn't as strong as it should be, and all this excitement . . ."

In the Pavlov flat Grisha was helping Miss Parker and Jane into their heavy coats and galoshes. Ludmilla and Sasha, whose factories were a good way off, had already gone to work. Grisha had no classes till the afternoon so he took his guests to the end of the block. The fresh morning air blew away the last wisps of the night's fatigues. They all looked bright and alert again as they scrunched down the path to the outer gate. The sky was strangely violet and the snow looked quite blue. Great black rooks were hopping about on the frozen trees.

Grisha went thoughtfully back to the flat. He had a treat for his sister and brother-in-law, tickets for *Swan Lake* at the Bolshoi theatre that evening. He hadn't told them yet. He must ring up Sasha who would have got to his work by now. Grisha reached for the telephone.

## IV

### *Work and Play*

PROFESSOR BORODIN got off the crowded tram and stamped through the snow until he reached his museum. It was beyond Arbat, in a little turning off Nikitski boulevard.

Old Pyotr, the doorkeeper, greeted him with a bow and a broad smile. He was a big fellow with a white beard and childish blue eyes. He had been on the job for more than forty years and wouldn't let them pension him off. "See here, Professor Borodin," he would say with dignity, every time the subject came up, "kindly tell the committee that I wouldn't think of it at any price. No one else could keep the courtyard swept and the doorknobs polished as I do. No one but me knows exactly how the keys are to be organized. I refuse to give up my responsibilities to the State and the workers. You tell them that, Comrade Professor. You know very well I love this place as much as you do and couldn't live without it. Tell them I'm not seventy yet, that I'm an old soldier and won't be pensioned and that I'm as strong as a horse—look at me now," and he would thump his broad chest (on which reposed an astonishing assortment of military decorations).

So Pyotr remained doorkeeper, and his imposing blue uniform and glittering brass buttons were always to be seen on duty, especially on Rest-days when the number of visitors to the museum trebled and quadrupled.

Professor Borodin crossed the black-and-white paved hall, greeted the girl at the post-card kiosk, greeted the smiling char in the red kerchief and went to the garderobe where he was helped out of outdoor clothes.

Then rubbing his hands together he strode into his office just as the museum clock chimed ten. His day had begun.

His staff were there waiting for him with the day's programme. It was a long and varied one—classes to instruct, visitors to show around, a special seminar to prepare for fieldwork in the spring, a delegation of foreign professors to entertain, some new material to examine and classify. He greeted his staff. There were eight people on the staff, but two were away with an expedition in the Crimea and were not due back until the spring. They were all very young, the oldest not more than twenty-two, and they ran the museum admirably under the Professor's eye.

Maria, the youngest on the staff, was not quite eighteen. She looked

after the archives and was preparing a thesis in conjunction with her staff work.

Yanka, a native of Byelo-Russia, was responsible for the arrangement of material and travelling exhibitions.

They were all proud of their Folk Art Museum. It was so arranged that it told its own story coherently and without fatigue, as a good writer unfolds his tale. It had a small but representative section on Folk Art outside the U.S.S.R. The rest of the museum was devoted to Folk Art inside the U.S.S.R.

One room led into another; the cases were not overcrowded; the labelling was brief and explicit and the display of objects a delight to the eye. Though it was not a large museum, and though fresh and exciting material poured in continually, Professor Borodin (who detested muddle everywhere except in his own sitting-room where he thrived on it) triumphantly prevented his cherished museum from becoming overcrowded. How? Wholesale banishment to the cellars? No! That had distressed him when he had visited the British Museum, where he was on terms of long-standing friendship with the ethnological staff. Then how? The size of the U.S.S.R. had solved his problem for him—190,000,000 people scattered over so large a surface of the earth. A museum doesn't necessarily consist of objects of interest labelled in static glass cases. The Moscow Folk Museum launched a series of travelling exhibitions. They took characteristic exhibits, a skeleton staff of lecturers, and they toured to the furthestmost ends of the Soviet Union. This innovation met with extraordinary success and each year was being expanded.

The skeleton staff in charge of each exhibition brought back with them fresh data and material from their travels and so it went on, the museum acting as a kind of heart, pumping out vital energy to the most outlying members of the community.

Each of the staff took turns to go out on these travelling exhibitions, looking forward eagerly to each new one, keeping journals and preparing by a strict training in camping, cooking, first-aid, and so on. For the majority of their travelling exhibitions went to far-off districts amongst primitive villages and to the new industrial enterprises in places as remote as Novo Sibirsk and Kuibishev.

"It's quite simple," said Professor Borodin. "It's quite simple for the Chukchi Walrus bone-carvings of Siberia, the carpets of Turkmenia, the clay toys of Zagorsk, the needlework of Reshetilovka, all to come here to Moscow for us Moscovites and our distinguished guests to enjoy. Our problem has been to show the Siberian Nenets fishermen up in the arctic circle the Turkmenian carpets from the tropics, and to show our Turkmen those walrus carvings. A good museum should be able to be peripatetic.





Time and experience had taught them the best methods of packing fragile exhibits for jolting journeys of weeks at a time. The staff watched over their treasures like anxious mothers. Accidents were rare. The whole scheme was state-financed and managed simply and without waste.

By the time Professor Borodin had set each of his staff to work for the day and read through his morning post it was eleven, and his first class was waiting for him.

They were from the University of Moscow, about equal numbers of youths and girls. Most of them would be going out to do prospecting or teaching or engineering when they graduated. Professor Borodin was a good lecturer. He was provocative and learned at the same time. And he was dealing with living cultures, not dead ones—it made his work more difficult and even more exciting.

At twelve his class ended and he went to his study to examine some new exhibits collected and sent by a travelling unit from Khokhloma.

Just before one he rang his home and had a chat with his wife.

At one he received a delegation of foreign visitors, English and American professors and fieldworkers, and showed them over the museum. Then he gave them tea and caviar sandwiches in the museum canteen.

"In Russia we eat our principal meal at four," he explained. "If we ate a hearty meal at midday we should waste two hours over it and be half asleep all the afternoon. You see this way we have a snack which takes only half an hour and work straight on till four. Then we have our main meal at leisure and still have a long evening before us."

But, lest his guests should feel hungry now, he pressed more and more sandwiches upon them.

"To-morrow night," he said, "VOKS have arranged a reception for you to meet some of our ethnological professors and fieldworkers—then I promise you a real Soviet banquet."

After the delegation had gone Professor Borodin took a seminar, after which he escorted a party of delighted Pioneers round the museum. Then he presided over a meeting of the entire museum staff to discuss plans of work.

Pyotr, the kiosk girl, the char in the red kerchief, were all present, and each submitted a report and listened attentively to everyone else's. The kiosk girl complained of lack of post-cards—the demand was always greater than the supply. Professor Borodin shrugged his shoulders at this. "You all know how acute our paper shortage is, comrades. Not only has our demand for paper increased enormously because everyone reads so much now, but alas we are obliged to use so much potential paper for armament. We shall spare no efforts to keep war away from our dear land, but we must always be prepared. If the world were happily at peace this would not



be necessary. As it is we should be fools to neglect preparation for the protection of our country and its culture. Look at it like this : these extra post-cards you ask for, Nadia Petrovna, are being used to defend this museum."

The staff nodded appreciation of this point and old Pyotr added loudly, "And I myself promise to defend our beautiful museum with a rifle also, Professor Borodin. Just let the enemy dare approach Nikitski boulevard," and he slapped his chest sternly.

The meeting was then closed.

Boris, being off duty, was relaxing in his own manner. He spent the morning comfortably in his Japanese kimono and light wicker slippers—telephoning his friends—reading all the newspapers—taking coffee with his mother, and finally preparing lunch.

When Agasha came in to give a neighbourly hand, she found Boris with a large apron tied over his kimono, solemnly breaking eggs in the kitchen. With the precision of a surgeon at work he proceeded to make an omelette and they all three shared a merry lunch which included tangerines and ended up unexpectedly with glasses of cherry brandy.

Then Boris affectionately tucked up his mother for her afternoon rest and dressed himself. By three he was struggling into a crowded tram bound for the Leningradski chaussé where he was going to the editorial offices of *Pravda* to see his chief.

After long months of Paris he absorbed the smells and sounds of his native Moscow with delight. No detail escaped his sharp eyes. The general standard of the women's dress (crude though it was compared to the coquettish modes of Paris) was higher than it had been. He noticed that a lot of the people on the tram were reading, and he noticed what they were reading—mostly technical books—and he counted the number of GTO badges (Ready for Labour and Defence), quite a lot, the girls about as many as the boys and some were worn by not so young people. He was already in the suburbs. Boris hopped off the tram and crossing the wide boulevard turned sharp to the right.

He passed the fine new house just built for the Arctic explorer, Professor Schmidt and his organization, and scrambling over the slippery pavement came to the imposing editorial offices of the *Pravda*.

Greetings from the doorkeeper. Greetings from the liftman. Greetings from the subs, and a very hearty greeting from the editor. Glasses of tea, cigarettes, all the newest political gossip exchanged. Boris was again in his familiar surroundings.

After his talk Boris rang up the *Moscow Daily News* to invite Jane out to dinner. But Jane said she was up to her eyes in work and suggested he come round and have a snack with her at the newspaper canteen. Yes, he would.

He stopped on his way there to buy some books. He and Jane shared a passion for indiscriminate reading, but Boris had the added advantage or disadvantage of being unable to resist anything in print in any of eight languages. He read inordinately, and his sharply ironic mind and retentive memory stored away an amazing hotch-potch of information. But in Boris's migrant hotel life there was no physical space for a library. He had therefore renounced the lust of book-possession and developed the habit of abandoning the books he had done with at whichever of his friends' house or flat or hotel room he happened to be visiting.

Books under both arms, he now paused outside the new fish stores on Gorkova. The windows were enticingly set out with strings of shimmering pearls and opalescent oyster shells. There were silver salmon and immense fishes from the Caspian sea. Bowls of red caviar and bowls of black caviar and bowls of big grey caviar.

"Like a ballet at the Marinski!" murmured Boris admiringly to himself. "I really must buy something nice for Mother." And in he marched.

The shop was paved with white marble, and in the centre of the stores was a large statue of a deep-sea fisherman hauling at a real net. Boris moved from counter to counter, stopping at the buffet to whet his appetite for dinner by nibbling various delicious fish trifles in mayonnaise and aspic.

At last he emerged with a pile of neat parcels. These, added to the two armfuls of books he had already bought, made walking an adventure and a tram an impossibility.

He was fortunate enough to pick up a taxi, into which he flung himself and his burdens, telling the grinning chauffeur to take him to the *Moscow Daily News* offices.

The *Moscow Daily News* had started in a burst of almost amateur enthusiasm at a time when paper, printers and accommodation were all extremely scarce in Moscow, and though now a flourishing concern with a pretty large circulation it retained its original characteristics to a marked degree. The editorial offices were situated in a pretentious mansion originally the home of a rich Moscow merchant, whose architectural ideas combined the grandiose with the intimate in an astonishing manner. Boris, entering through the imposing portals of carved wood, found himself in a large paved hall, whose proportions were somehow all wrong. Round the walls was the original frieze the Moscow merchant had ordered—blousy Wagnerian nymphs and naiads painted in lurid colours. A wall-newspaper mounted on a baize board obscured one section of this frieze.

Quite a lot of the hall was occupied by realistic life-size statues in white marble, chiefly plump nymphs, dressing and undressing, with all the impedimenta of marble underclothing and corsets of the late 'nineties.

Every available inch of the floor space (not taken up by the statuary) was occupied by business-like wooden tables at which sat girls typing away busily. Papers and MS. overflowed everywhere and the marble nymphs were continually being used to hold letter-files and carbons and boxes of cigarettes. English and American and Russian voices filled the air.

In and out of this busy throng slipped the art editor, a gentle young man of Chinese birth in horn-rimmed glasses and with an upper-class English accent. He was looking for something or someone, but his voice was inaudible in the babel.

Boris found Jane, cigarette in mouth, at her desk pounding out the final lines of her paragraph. This done she dragged the sheet from the roller, grabbed a page of proofs with blotted corrections in purple ink and thrust these proofs under the arm of the marble houri by her desk.

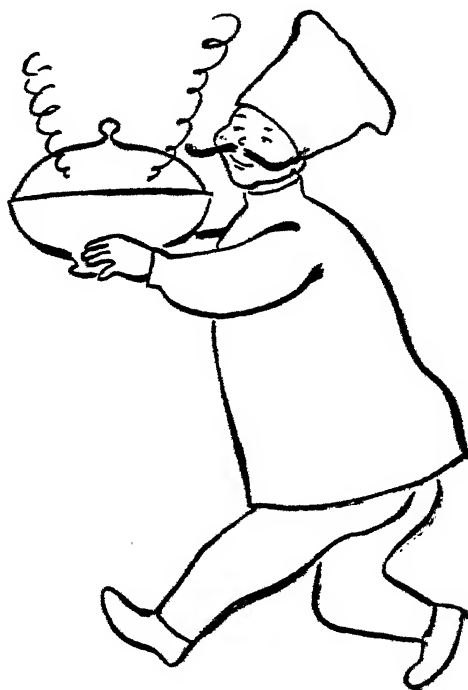
"There, that can wait," she sighed, flinging the typescript on to another table. "I'll attend to it after dinner. Machine tool production—not my line—but Oh boy, do these statistics do my American heart good." And Jane pushed her hair back from her forehead with inky fingers.

The dining-room of the *Moscow Daily News* was as crowded and noisy as the main hall. Everyone was eating, drinking, talking and laughing, and there were a couple of interviews going on at the same time. The waitress, who wore a white overall and a white kerchief, brought them



immense platefuls of *schee* and hunks of rye-bread, and they started to eat.

"The boys tried to introduce American food into this dive," said Jane between mouthfuls, "and the cooks were willing, but the food wasn't. We tried corned beef hash and *chilli con carne* and Boston baked beans, but it all came out wrong somehow and tasted like Russian food in disguise. So we've gone back to Russian food *au naturel* again and I like it better. And we can always eat cheese with our apple pie if we get a yen for it,



can't we?" The waitress brought immense helpings of *Bœuf à la stroganoff* and pickled cucumbers, and took away the empty soup-plates.

"No jaded appetites for us," grinned Jane, as she tucked in heartily. "I remember in the Soviet boat coming over from Hays Wharf, London—my first Russian breakfast—three eggs . . . especially after the London hotel I'd been staying in, where the men got two eggs and us women only got one. Russians believe in lots of everything. O.K. by me. You can't work hard if you don't eat plenty. Here's our rag," said Jane, propping her elbow onto a damp news-sheet which promptly left its inky imprint on her sleeve. "My life-blood for this. . . . But when you think how it's

produced it's a miracle it gets printed at all. My dear Boris, do you realize that not only have we a very limited selection of English type here (and you know what immense demands there are on what little there is), but that all our printers are Russians who do not know one single English letter from another. They work by the shapes of the letters. It's miraculous that they get the paper printed at all."

"Tk! tk!" said Boris, waving his hands expansively.

"Talking of newspapers," went on Jane, "have you heard the latest story of Fred Ellis and his interpreter?" Fred Ellis, the veteran American cartoonist of *Trud* (the Trades Union Newspaper), was adored by everybody, and all the Russian workers loved his drawings which had a dignity and simplicity unsurpassed since Steinlen. Although he had lived many years in Moscow he spoke hardly a word of Russian. Indeed, like most good graphic artists, he didn't often talk at all even in his own language. His pencil however was never still and spoke most eloquently for him.

"Well," said Jane, lighting another cigarette. "Fred's interpreter was explaining to him an idea for a cartoon about famine in China. 'Comrade Ellis,' says he, 'could you kindly draw us some Chinese coolies holding up their bowels?'"

"What?" says Fred, puffing away at his pipe.

"Yes, you draw the starving Chinese peasants with their bowels in their hands."

"Surely not their *bowels*," pleaded poor Fred. "Atrocities, yes. But surely . . ."

"The interpreter tried again with even more curious results. At last in despair he got out his Russian-English dictionary and found the word. 'There, you see,' he said triumphantly, pointing to the word 'Bowls'."

"I want my mother to have a quiet evening or two," said Boris as they left the table. "She's not at all well. She will try to do too much. She's going off to a sanatorium in Kisslavodsk in the spring."

"This Soviet tempo is certainly hard on delicate old ladies," replied Jane. "But she takes it all as a matter of course and she's marvellous with Petka."

"It's such a jolt coming back to Moscow, my dear Jane. I can't explain it to anyone but you, because you know how Europe feels. Coming back is like dropping by parachute on to another planet. Different values to everything and, as soon as I am adjusted, off I go again and it's more difficult than ever, especially with war looming up so inevitably over all Europe—one has a mental migraine all the time as before a thunderstorm. I'm delighted with Ludmilla's marriage. She's my pride and joy. We've lived in the next flat for ages. I helped to teach her her alphabet. Sasha seems a good thing. I like this new generation. They're so clear and

sensible—like a breath of fresh air. What shall we do this evening, Jane? There's a new Pudovkin film at the *Udarnik*. Then we might look in for half an hour at the news-film theatre on Pushkin Place, and drop into the writers' club and see the boys later on, with a nice beautiful bottle of red wine."

"Suits me," said Jane. "But don't keep me out all night again to-night, Boris. I must get up early to-morrow and do a job in the country. How's books?"

"I'm reading Mrs. Humphrey Ward's *Robert Elsmere* now," said Boris, running his hand through his hair with a rueful gesture, as of a man confessing to opium-taking, "sandwiched in between Norman Douglas and Rudyard Kipling. Nice beautiful mixture, don't you think, Jane? These Victorian lady novelists, I kiss their hands! Six hundred pages of close print and a fine piece of moral stocktaking in the last chapter. Catherine Leyburn. What a woman! Reminds me of our early women revolutionaries."

"Ah! I never got over Mr. Rochester myself," admitted Jane. "I sure do like my hero to foam at the mouth now and again. Now don't dare ask me about *my* novel. There it sits. Maybe I'd get on with it if I didn't feel I looked so darned like a lady novelist already. Puts me off every time I approach it," she went on despondently. "Then again I get all haywire with adjectives. I prefer understatement, but I write like Niagara Falls."

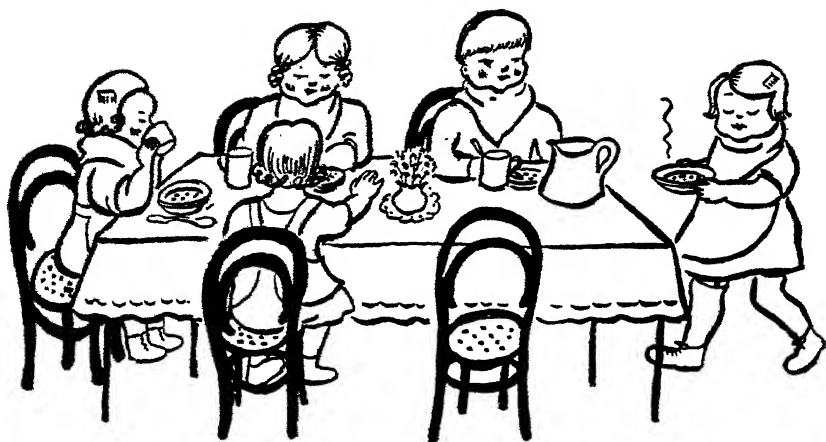
"I used to know a fellow in England," said Boris, with a reminiscent look in his eye, "who had only read two books in his life. One was the Bible and the other was *The Thousand Nights and One Night*. He was an artist by profession. As soon as he got to the end of one he would begin the other, and when he had finished that one he would start the first all over again. That's the way to live. I envy him. But I'm a hopeless case. I can resist anything in the world except print."

"Let's go, brother," said Jane, putting on her hat, absent-mindedly rouging her lips as she rose from the table without a thought of consulting a mirror.

Mamma Pavlova lifted Leonid from the sledge and pushed open the outer door of the crèche. A wave of warmth blew out.

A young probationer nurse of sixteen, plump and smiling in white overalls and cap, took the boy from her and took off his outer clothes. Leonid triumphantly found his own peg (he knew it because it had a picture of a red elephant painted on a wooden label, and that elephant was Leonid's peg). Then he was put into a clean pinafore and house-shoes after the details of his toilet had been attended to, and he ran to join his small friends already





there. Instantly they were in a child's world. Lilliputian chairs and tables, children's pictures hung low on the walls, nonslip rugs and rounded surfaces, gay flowering plants on the low windowsills and a large tank aquarium in which darted goldfish, tadpoles and a newt or two.

There were about fifteen babies altogether, most of them between one and three years' old. The youngest crawled about inside a large playpen, patiently trying to balance wooden blocks or striving to grasp a coloured toy just out of reach. The bricks were purposely made too large for a child to handle alone, in order to teach collaboration. The older children climbed up a small staircase and with shrieks of joy hurled themselves down the chute.

Mamma Pavlova, having organized the babies' dinner, popped in from the kitchen to see her darlings. She was greeted with cries of joy and invited to join in their round singing-dancing game before going back to her vegetables.

Now it was time for morning milk. The children pulled out their tiny chairs and tables and the oldest children waited on the younger ones. Then it was time for morning rest and presently there was no sound but quiet regular breathing. The nursery staff used this half-hour for a lecture by the head nurse, for the young nurses were training to become qualified nurses in their turn.

Rest-time over, a scuffling and bustling for outdoor clothes. A little girl named Veruchka was in tears, having got mixed up between Leonid's elephant and her own sea-lion. Leonid was dealing with the matter a little too firmly. The young probationer nurse sorted it all out, comforted the wailing little girl and demonstrated the difference between elephants and sea-lions until they all laughed again and each had his own clothes. But

Leonid was not allowed to get away with bullying. Gently his error was corrected. Giving and taking is easier to teach to a group of children than to one ; large families are the best education of all.

Now all the children were dressed in warm outdoor clothes and off they went singing a childrens' march in their shrill tuneless voices. One nurse led the crocodile ; another brought up the rear. The youngest toddlers were pulled on sledges. In half an hour they returned with bright eyes and cheeks glowing crimson. Off with overcoats, fur hats, mittens and galoshes. Leonid solemnly found his elephant peg and good-naturedly showed Veruchka where her sea-lion was.

Now it was time for a story. Nurse told them the old Russian tale of the turnip. They all knew it by heart already, but they adored it and demanded it almost every day. They all took part in it.

"Once upon a time, my darlings," began the plump young nurse as soon as they were seated round her in a rapt circle.

"Once upon a time there was an old farmer and his wife, and one day he planted a turnip in his kitchen garden, and the sun shone and the rain rained and the wind blew and the turnip took root and grew. And it grew and it grew and it grew and one day the farmer's wife said, 'Husband, be so kind as to pull up that turnip and I will cook it for our dinner.'

"So the farmer went to the vegetable garden to pull up the turnip and he tried and tried but he *couldn't* pull it up. So he called his wife (Klavdia, will you come and be the wife?)."

Klavdia jumped up eagerly and ran to the nurse to act her part.

"'Wife, wife, it's so big I can't pull it up alone ; come and help me !' So the wife held on to the husband and the husband held on to the turnip and they pulled and they pulled but they *couldn't* pull it up.

"So the wife called to their son, 'Vanya, Vanya, the turnip is so big we can't pull it up ourselves. Please come and help us.' (Valerian, will you come and be Vanya?). So Vanya held on to the farmer's wife (like this, Valerian, hang on to her pinny, darling) and the farmer's wife held on to the farmer and the farmer held on to the turnip and they pulled and they pulled but they couldn't pull it up.

"Then Vanya called to the dog. 'Dog, dog, the turnip is so big we can't pull it up. Come and help us.' (Anna, will you come and be the dog, dear? No, Semyon, you were dog yesterday. You shall be cat if you like.) So the dog held on to Vanya and Vanya held on to the farmer's wife and the farmer's wife held on to the farmer and the farmer held on to the turnip and they pulled and they pulled but they couldn't get it out.

"Then the dog called to the cat, 'Pusscat, pusscat, the turnip is too big. Come and help us ! (Now you may come, Semyon. Mew like a real puss, walk daintily on padded feet, and pretend to wave your tail.

There, that's a beautiful cat, Semyon. Now hold on to Anna.) So the pusscat held on to the dog and the dog held on to Vanya and Vanya held on to the farmer's wife and the farmer's wife held on to the farmer and the farmer held on to the turnip and they pulled and they pulled but they couldn't get it up."

All the children were now in a ferment, though they knew exactly what was coming.

"So the pusscat called to the little tiny mouse, 'Mouse, mouse, the turnip is too big. We can't get it up. Please come and help us! (Veruchka, would you like to be the mouse to-day?)"

Veruchka ran to the tail of the queue and flung her arms tightly round Semyon.

"So the little mouse held on to the pusscat and the pusscat held on to dog and the dog held on to Vanya and Vanya held on to the farmer's wife and the farmer's wife held on to the farmer and all together they pulled ONE! TWO!! THREE!!! and at last UP CAME THE GIANT TURNIP."

And with screams of joy the chain of children toppled and fell like a row of dominoes.

To-day it was Leonid's turn to ring the dinner-bell, which he did with great gusto. Again out came the diminutive chairs and tables. Then the children trotted off to be washed before their dinner. They set out tablecloths, plates and spoons and baskets of rye-bread on the tables. Now they were all ready seated expectantly, eyes on the door. And here came Mamma Pavlova, bearing an immense tureen of soup, followed by her two helpers carrying huge dishes of vegetables.

"And here," she beamed, "my darlings, is your giant turnip." And there indeed it was, purée and swimming in butter.

The children waited on each other. Dinner proceeded cheerfully and they ate an astonishing amount.

After dinner an hour's sleep. Then boisterous games to music alternated with quiet games with clay and water and sand until it was four o'clock and time to go home.

From the factories and offices came a stream of Mammias. All the little ones were muffled into their outdoor clothes and off they went home chattering away, each eager to tell his mother all the doings of the day.

Mamma Pavlova called at the factory kitchen on her way home. It was a lively scene; crowds of workers were pouring into the big airy dining-rooms; waitresses in white overalls and kerchiefs bustled about carrying laden trays. On each table was a fresh green plant, the earthenware plantpot decorated with a broad ribbon of birch bark. The table-cloths were freshly laundered and the string orchestra on the dais was just starting

to play a light waltz. Mamma Pavlova was proud of the scene for which she was largely responsible. Before she took on the crèche-kitchen she had worked hard organizing this dining-room. Before it had not been good. The table-cloths hadn't been clean, the service had been perfunctory, no flowers and no music and the menus hadn't enough variety. Patiently she had tackled each problem in turn, and her indomitable energy, her persistence and good humour had soon brought results.

Then, that job done, the House-committee set her to work in the crèche-kitchen, she hoped for a long time for she adored all her babies. But she would go where she was most needed, and she had now got the children's kitchen running so well that another woman could safely take over.

Mamma Pavlova came out of the canteen carrying two three-tiered containers with tightly covered lids—her family dinner and the Kravchenko's—already cooked and piping hot, from which deliciously inviting odours escaped into the icy air. She and Leonid played a guessing game the rest of the way home. What sort of soup? What sort of fish? What sort of pudding?

Doctor Kravchenko caught them up and they entered the flats together. She was feeling rather tired after her day's work at the clinic, but at the sight of Leonid her face lit up. He flung himself ecstatically upon her and she gave him a pick-a-back up the stairs.

Sasha and Ludmilla dined at home with the family. The factory canteen had prepared a good meal which was even approved by critical Mamma Pavlova (who was known to be herself an excellent cook). They had :

BORSCH (BEETROOT) SOUP FILLET OF STEAK WITH BUCK-WHEAT PICKLED CUCUMBERS AND CARROTS APPLE FRITTERS
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Dinner over, Ludmilla and Sasha went to their room to dress for the theatre. Ludmilla, feeling very festive, wore her blue dress, her elegant shoes and her gold locket. When she re-entered the sitting-room she found Sasha her husband, and Grisha deep in a game of chess. Grisha carefully lifted the chessboard without moving its pieces and stood it on a corner of the bureau. Sasha had cornered his king with a queen and a rook. He and Sasha had been playing out this game for weeks. It looked as though it would never end (sometimes they were both too busy, or one or

the other absent), but they made a move whenever they could snatch a moment.

They set off across the frozen garden. The skating-rink was lit up and a merry crowd was disporting itself on the ice. Polina and Petka waved to them as they passed. It was bitterly cold—one of those sudden drops in temperature which precede the first loosening of frost which herald the spring. The cold felt like a physical presence in the streets.

Ludmilla snuggled her nose deeper into her heavy fur collar and drew closer to her husband. They got off the Metro and crossed the Theatre Square. Now they were in front of the famous Opera House Bolshoi.



Its huge pillars were silhouetted against the brightly lit interior and high above their heads the prancing horses on the pediment stood out against the star-sprinkled sky.

They mounted the steps and entered into a three hours' enchantment. Going to the theatre in Russia is an evening's dedication. However unpunctual he may be in other matters, no Russian would dream of being late for the theatre, and if by some unforeseen and extraordinary mischance he should be prevented from being there well before the curtain rises, he will wait, silent and abashed, in the couloir until the first entracte permits him to creep to his place. As for dining late and pushing into the stalls halfway through the first act, he would be horrified at the mere thought.

The scene in the lobby was an animated one. Before the wardrobe many theatre-goers were pulling off their heavy coats, felt boots and galoshes, and the cloakroom attendants took each bundle deftly and handed over in return a numbered brass tally. There were many uniforms, short silk frocks, older women in blouses and skirts or old-fashioned black silk gowns. It was still half an hour before the curtain was due to rise. Sasha and Ludmilla, arm in arm, strolled round the vestibule chatting and pausing now and then to greet friends. *Swan Lake* is an old favourite. A warning bell sounded. They hurried to their seats. Ludmilla looked round the great theatre as excited as a child. It was packed from floor to ceiling and the faint stir and hum of an expectant audience went to her head like wine. The magnificent double-box directly facing the stage (once reserved for the Tsar) was filled with a group of peasant girls, in their kerchiefs and embroidered country blouses, spick and span for the occasion. There were numerous Red Army men, a good many airmen and some sailors among the audience, and various groups of students and factory workers whose seats had obviously been reserved in blocks.

The overture had already begun. Three knocks announced the impending rise of the curtain. Ludmilla sighed happily and relaxed. The enchantment was at work. The theatre darkened and the curtain rose slowly on the poignant unreality of green-blue marshes—the persistent eerie melody carried them off to another world of strange northern magic and melancholy. With every exquisite device of grace and suggestion the story unfolded itself. The audience sat still as frozen water until the prima ballerina's first solo, when a tumult of applause rose like a fountain. At the entracte, Ludmilla shook herself from her trance, and with the rest of the audience she and Sasha, arm in arm, paced round and round the vestibule, discussing the dancing and stopping occasionally to examine one of the theatre pictures. The buffet was in full swing; glasses of tea, butter-bröt, sugar cakes disappeared like snow in sunlight. Again the warning bell, and back they went to the mysterious dream-world of the seven swans.

It was an exquisite evening.

When it was all over and they were on their way home, Ludmilla said with a sigh of content, "O beautiful, Sasha, how beautiful and what perfect control she has over every tiny muscle. It is a delight to watch. But, you know, we Moscovites don't seem to understand ballet quite as well as the Leningrad balletomanes. You should just hear them applaud the prima ballerina's solo at the Marinsky. When I go to stay at Uncle Fedor's we always spend at least one night at the Marinsky."

Mention of Leningrad reminded Sasha of something he had been meaning to tell Ludmilla all the evening.

"I almost forgot, Miliushka. You know our engineering works makes

a practice of sending some of its young men abroad to study technical problems at the famous foreign works in Germany and England. Well . . . well, you see, Miliushka, at our meeting to-day my name was put up as a possible candidate."

"How do they select them?"

"Well," confessed Sasha with reluctant pride, "it's the best workers who get the chance. We don't want to waste our workers' money on engineers who can't make the most of it. Of course, it's a great honour really even to be considered, but now we're just married and everything. . . . However, it won't be decided for some time yet, and the group won't actually be sent out until May, very likely. Let's forget about it for the time, shall we? So much may happen before then, who knows?"

Sasha tenderly tucked her hand under his huge arm and hurried her across the frozen Square and on towards home.

*Clinic*

It was a brisk day towards the middle of April. Snow still lay on the ground, but it was likely to dissolve into moist black patches soon turning to puddles underfoot, freezing solid again at night, half melting during the day. The sky was a strange blue-green, translucent as fine china, with puffs of rosy cloud drifting aimlessly. There was an unmistakable smell of spring in the air and some of the bolder girls had actually started wearing their between-season clothes, though their elders shook warning fingers and said winter had not had her final word and heavy snowstorms might yet be confidently expected.

Great chunks of snow detached themselves from the roof-tops and fell with a dull thud. People splashed through the messy streets in galoshes. The snow had lost its salt-like crispness and was difficult to brush off outdoor clothes because it melted so suddenly. The street cleaners were sweeping up the mess, hurling the moist snow into carts by the spadeful then stolidly lighting bonfires beneath the carts to melt it. The children (now that sliding and skating were spoiled) were already looking forward to the delights of summer. Every House-committee in Moscow was having glorious arguments as to the number, extent and choice of the summer flowers and plants which were to turn their own special gardens into the finest in Moscow for the summer season.

Doctor Kravchenko's gynæcological clinic (which formed one section of the district polyclinic) was a cheerful airy room with neat white cupboards and discreet surgical couch. Through the large windows a flood of pale spring sunshine poured itself.

Doctor Kravchenko, dressed in spotless white overalls, with her hair tucked under a white kerchief, was seated at her work-table; her papers, files, rubber gloves, chemical bottles, all in exact order and within easy reach, for both by nature and training she loved precision. Her patients came in a steady stream. They were all residents in the district. One or two were newcomers. She dealt rapidly but sympathetically with each case. Most of the women were already known to her and they all liked and respected her. Some of the cases she directed to other departments of the polyclinic. Most of the expectant mothers came for their routine examination; a few, nearing their eighth month, came to have their cards



signed for their maternity benefits (two months paid vacation from work, free layette, etc.). The last patient had been a cheerful peasant woman who had actually started labour pains in the surgery (as though feeling herself in safe hands) and Doctor Kravchenko, after a couple of business-like telephone calls, had her whisked away to the labour ward at once. It was all in the morning's work.

"Come in," called Doctor Kravchenko. The next patient entered, a woman of thirty-five. Doctor Kravchenko examined her. She was several months with child. During the examination the woman began to weep.

"What's the matter, my dear?" asked the doctor. "Husband?"

"He's deserted me," sobbed the woman. "He's taken to drinking lately—didn't turn up at the factory once or twice—was reprimanded. We had a quarrel about it at home and now he's gone off, and me with another child on the way. We have four already, Doctor, and fine healthy kids they are too—worthy of a better father they are, Doctor, may I be riven by lightning if I lie."

"Don't worry about him," said Doctor Kravchenko. "You come and talk to our clinic lawyer. She will tell you what to do. Come back and see me again in a month's time. There, my dear, bathe your face. Now off to the lawyer and don't worry. We will look after you."

The woman took herself to the office of the clinic lawyer which was on the same floor. She looked round the room rather nervously, clasping and unclasping her hands. On the wall was a notice:

#### NOTICE

A pregnant woman has the right to demand full support from the father of the child during pregnancy and for six months after it.

If you need to enforce this claim, consult our Lawyer.

She will help you if you are unable to work. If you are out of work she will help you to find suitable employment.

"Please sit down," she said, indicating a chair. "Tell me your trouble and let's see what we can do to help you."

The woman, not without more tears, began to stammer out her story.

"Do you still love him?" asked the woman lawyer quietly.

"Love him? Love him, Comrade Lawyer? Love a good-for-nothing drunkard like that? Besides, when a woman already has four children and is expecting a fifth . . ."

"Then you *don't* want him back?" asked the woman lawyer.



"No, I don't—yes, I do—that is, I want him to behave as he should. I can't stand the disgrace, Comrade Lawyer. What will my neighbours think? To be abandoned like a village maiden and me with four kids and another on the way. It isn't right!"

"No, of course it isn't right," replied the woman lawyer. "And he isn't going to get away with it. We shall track him down, and he will be obliged to support his family. There is no possibility of evasion. We



have his cards and he must register wherever he goes. Don't worry yourself about that, my dear. Two-thirds of his wages will be paid over to you regularly, and if there's any delay we have the means to look after you till the matter is adjusted. As to the new baby, you are entitled to medical attention here and a free accouchement like every other Soviet woman, and your factory will give you eight weeks paid leave. By the way, where do you work?"

"At the Iskra textile factory," replied the woman. "I'm only an unskilled hand yet, Comrade Lawyer, but I'm learning and I hope soon to become more qualified."

"Good for you," said the woman lawyer. "Now let us consider your problem. In the first place, I think your husband will probably return, whether you want him back or not. They almost always do, you know. Anyway you needn't worry about money. We'll see to that for you. In the second place, if he does come back, can you make a better go of it this time, do you think? By the way, what was his work? Watchman? Couldn't he do something more skilled than that? Try to put him on to qualifying for more important work. Our country is crying out for skilled men and women. Men drink to excess when they feel inferior—it's an escape from their own depression. But are you sure you are not a little to blame too? Did you scold him often?"

"And why shouldn't I?" cried the woman. "Didn't I have cause, Comrade Lawyer?"

"No man likes a scolding wife. Why not try to be nice to him and at the same time encourage him with practical help," suggested the woman lawyer. "You may be able to pull your marriage together again. Most important of all, remember, is for your children to have a happy and peaceful home life. Better that you and your husband should live apart if you do nothing but quarrel when you're together. It is wrong and wicked to bring up children in such an atmosphere. Better no father than a besotten and quarrelsome one, don't you think?"

The woman nodded her head forlornly.

"Comrade," said the woman lawyer, leaning over the desk and patting her hand reassuringly. "Don't feel your dignity is lowered because he's gone off. Don't think there's anything specially elevating in the mere crude fact of having a husband in the house when the husband drinks and is lazy. Ours is a vast country—there are no end of good men in it. You are how old . . . thirty-five? Now you might easily marry again—why not? I don't recommend divorce," pursued the woman lawyer. "It's not a thing to be undertaken lightly, especially where there are children. But when a domestic situation becomes hateful to both parties, why go on torturing each other? Some diseases will not yield except to the knife, and a hopelessly poisoned marriage is best cut asunder in my opinion. Sometimes you can even save a valuable friendship from the wreck."

She paused a second, then went on. "I don't speak without experience. My first husband and I could not get on with one another. Now we are divorced and have both made happy second marriages. Before, we could hardly bear to speak to each other; now we are the best of friends. He is a lawyer too—often he comes to ask my opinion on his difficult cases. There, let me take particulars. Come and see me in a month's time when you go to Doctor Kravchenko for your next examination. Meanwhile keep your chin up."

"Next, please," called Doctor Kravchenko, resuming her seat.

It was Ludmilla who entered.

"My dear girl," said Doctor Kravchenko, her face lighting up with a smile. "What? So soon? What an excitement for us all. Let me have a look at you, child. . . . Yes . . . I think so . . . it's a little soon to be quite sure," she said, after a careful examination and a few pertinent questions.

"Now, Ludmilla, you must positively produce a beautiful daughter for my Leonid."

"Oh," said Ludmilla breathlessly, "am I really going to have a baby? Isn't it exciting? I haven't breathed a word yet to anyone, not even Sasha, Doctor Kravchenko, in case I wasn't after all—but I have been feeling so queer and unlike myself lately, and . . .

Doctor Kravchenko watched her sympathetically. She thought what a pity it was one could only have one's first baby once; to a woman there is no other experience in the world which can rival it.

"Oh," said Ludmilla, "I *can* go on with everything as usual, can't I?—I'll feel better soon, I know—my work at the factory, and I was going to take my parachute-jumping test this summer. I've done several from the Practice Tower at the Park of Rest and Culture and want to qualify as soon as I can because I want to learn to fly . . . and Sasha may be going abroad for six months—I ought to go too. Oh dear, what a lot of things to rearrange!"

"Listen, Ludmilla. First, factory work. Certainly go on with it until your maternity leave starts. You'll have baby here, of course, in my own maternity wing. I shall be responsible for you. Parachute-jumping? I'm afraid not, my darling. That can wait until next year you see, and baby can't . . . perhaps when we have more knowledge of the effects of it, it may be found to be safe during pregnancy, but not yet. As to going abroad with Sasha, that's for you two to decide. Meanwhile, carry on as usual, swim, walk, dance, take all the exercise you like. Don't eat too much meat. Do eat lots of fruit and vegetables. Here is a calcium compound to help your teeth, and here is a glucose preparation if you feel sick when you wake up in the mornings. Now off with you! I expect you to be a model mother. Remember, when you produce your sixth child you qualify for the State grant!"

There was a family conference going on at Mamma Pavlova's. Sasha had at last been chosen. He was to go to England early in May to spend six months studying at Metro-Vickers. Ludmilla was already three months with child. Should she accompany her husband or not? Together (as

in everything else) the family debated the pros and cons. The arguments for going were :

1. It would be hard to be separated so soon for so long.
  2. It would be interesting for Ludmilla to see something of Europe.
- The arguments against going were, alas, more numerous :
1. Ludmilla's job—she was one of the best workers in the Iskra textile factory and couldn't give up her work lightly when the need was so great.



2. What work could she do in England? She couldn't bear the thought of sitting in provincial lodgings waiting for Sasha to return from work. To take an apartment and be only domestic wasn't enough to fill her active young life.
3. Perhaps the strongest reason—the baby. They all wanted it to be born in Russia, where Ludmilla could be near those she loved.

Ludmilla resolutely smeared away a tear which had started to roll down her cheek. "It's quite clear, my darlings," she said firmly. "Sasha must go and I can't go with him. Never mind, we shall write each other very, very often and long, long letters, and six months will soon be up, and you

must study very hard in England to justify being chosen. Try to come back in time for our baby's birth."

"But it's not all sad," said Sasha, feeling it was easier for him than for her. "We'll all celebrate May Day here in Moscow first and Ludmilla and I can spend a couple of days in Leningrad together before I catch the boat. That's something to look forward to."

"Put a lot of stamps on your letters, Sasha," implored Polina, who had just joined the philatelist circle at school.

"In England you'll be able to play good football—they're supposed to play specially well there," put in Grisha, trying hard to remember all he had heard about England, "only isn't it odd they actually play in the winter not in the summer like we do. Of course, English winters are hardly winters at all, mostly rain, like our between-seasons."

"You'll be able to go to Stratford-on-Avon where Shakespeare was born," cried Polina, remembering her literature class. "He lived in such a funny little *dacha*, all leaning forward on the top storey, just like those old-fashioned houses in the Crimea."

"We must ask Miss Parker to come and tell us all about it and what things to take," said Ludmilla, trying to be a practical wife. "Oh, and Boris! Let's go round and see if he's at home, he'll tell us everything."

"O!" cried Grisha in sudden anguish. "Our chess game. What shall we do?"

"Don't you worry, Grisha. Pooh! it's simple. We'll carry it on by letter. That will be a fine bit of organization for you, Red Army man. I, living in Manchester, England, will beat you stationed in Buryat-Mongolia, near Manchuria—by post!"

One evening some days later Sasha knocked on the door of the Kravchenko flat. Oleg Kravchenko himself opened it.

"All alone?"

"Ludmilla has gone to a meeting at her factory," said Sasha. "Grisha has taken Mamma and Polina to the Udarnik cinema."

"Well, my dear fellow, do come in. What can we do to entertain you? You see us as usual—up to the eyes in work. But let's brush aside these miserable blue-prints and medical reports for once and be neighbourly," and he forced the gigantic Sasha into his own armchair and thrust a box of cigarettes upon him.

"As a matter of fact," stammered Sasha, blushing crimson, "it . . . it was really Doctor Kravchenko I wanted to have a word with. I . . . I . . ."

"Well, Sasha, what can I do for you?" asked the Doctor, closing her books and looking up at him with a smile.

"Don't mind me," put in Kravchenko. "A doctor's husband learns to be discreet and I won't listen anyway."

"Oh," said Sasha, redder than ever. "Of course I don't mind you, Oleg Mikhailovitch, only . . ." He stopped in confusion and started off once again, this time more firmly.

"You know, Doctor Kravchenko, I'm going to England very soon and I'll be away for six months and probably the baby will be born before I get back. I did so want to share it all with Ludmilla, all the waiting and growing and the pain, at least, as much as a man can share. We've always done everything together, Ludmilla and I; it grieves me to leave her to do this all alone. My mother had eight of us and I was the eldest, and I remember that none of them came easily into the world. So I've been wandering round the Mother-and-Child Museum for hours hoping to learn more about it."

"And have you?" asked Doctor Kravchenko with quick professional interest (for she was one of the committee who had planned the exhibition).

"Oh yes, Doctor Kravchenko," replied Sasha earnestly. "At least I know roughly how a child comes into the world, and quite a lot about what ought to be done to him once he has come, but . . ."

"But what?"

"Well, Doctor Kravchenko, I want to know exactly what will be happening with my Ludmilla all the time. I want to know each stage and all the whole exact process. I . . . I thought perhaps you could lend me one of your medical books to take with me to England so that I can study it and keep pace with Ludmilla month by month, don't you see?"

"But of course, Alexander Constantinovitch, why not?" replied the Doctor gravely, for she could see he was afraid she might laugh at him. Sasha breathed a sign of something like relief, and making for the bookshelf began carefully to hunt through her medical library.

"O, my dear Sasha, not that one I beg you," cried Doctor Kravchenko, removing a large leather-bound volume from his hands. "That deals exclusively with births of a most morbid and unlikely kind. Here, you take this with you," presenting him with a neatly-bound book. "I have two copies. As a matter of fact," she continued, "when our Leonid was on the way, Kravchenko wanted to know all the process of birth—just as you do—and as he's so absent-minded I bought him a special copy for himself (see the inscription on the title page) in case he lost my only copy. But he never did lose it. He read it through from cover to cover and said it gave him a whole flood of new ideas for his airplane designs, didn't it, Oleg darling?" and Doctor Kravchenko smiled indulgently at her husband who was again completely absorbed in his work and hadn't heard a word.



## VI

### *May Day*

THE longed-for spring had come with a sudden rush. The melting of the snow disclosed sturdy growing shoots and the sun shone each day with added warmth. For weeks past the city had been preparing for the most joyful festival of the year—May Day. The boulevard Serpuchovka had for days resounded to the tramp of marching feet and rolling waves of song as groups of workers rehearsed their part in the May Day parade.

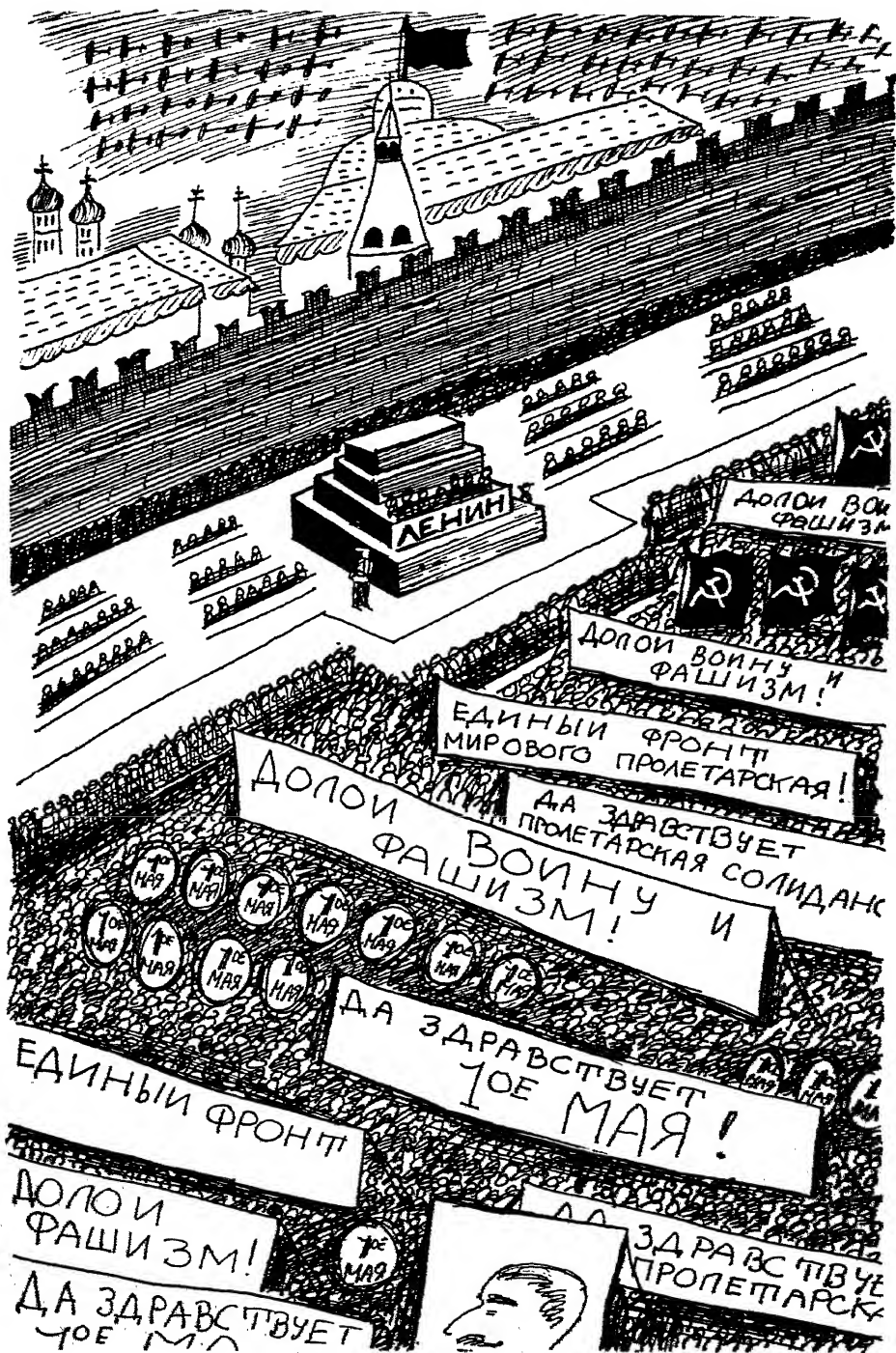
Mamma Pavlova had baked a delicious assortment of cakes and pies for the holidays and everyone worked at an increased pressure, the better to enjoy the coming three days' vacation.

Boris was in Berlin and Grisha well on his way to the Far Eastern frontier.

The evening before May Day they all went to meetings at their work where there were speeches followed by a party, but not too late because the next day was May Day.

Ludmilla had always loved May Day best of all the Soviet festivals. To her it meant not only spring-time and carnival but unity in thought with the millions of working people of all races, creeds and colours everywhere in the world. This year May Day was doubly poignant for she was with child and Sasha was going to England. The chemical changes in her body stirred her in a strange way—set her tingling with a curious impatience. Now she had stopped feeling sick, she had begun to feel extraordinarily well and powerful, as though all her faculties were strengthened and sharpened. This May Day, more than all the other May Days, would be wonderful, and perhaps it might be the last May Day in a world at peace.

Everyone was up early on May Day. Breakfast was a distracted meal in a flurry of arrangements and hasty packing of sandwiches. Off each person went to march in the procession. Mamma Pavlova was to march with the Moscow social workers; Sasha with the engineering section of the industrial workers; Ludmilla in the foremost ranks of the textile workers (for she had distinguished herself by skilful work); Polina with her school; Professor Borodin led his young staff in the Museums of Moscow section; Doctor Kravchenko marched with the Moscow Medical Service; Oleg Kravchenko and Petka carried the banner of the Aviation Research workers.





Leonid had been taken to the crèche, and Madame Borodina was to be one of the spectators who crammed the Red Square.

In the early morning rays of the cool golden sunlight the streets of Moscow were filled with people in their best clothes, all diverging on to Red Square. At the approaches to the Square itself the crowds became denser and slower. It was an orderly chaos, as a colony of bees is orderly. Each person knew his place and was intent on getting there on time. Those with tickets for admittance to the Square showed them to the militiamen who lowered a cordon and let them in, but most people were hurrying to the assembly-point of the particular unit with which they were to march. At the approach to Red Square there was an isolated Red Army man taking a small brush from his pocket and giving a vigorous last minute shine to his already gleaming leather topboots.

Professor Borodin had escorted his wife to the Square and seen her safely in her place before going to his unit. Let us stay with Madame Borodina and watch the parade from her place. She is directly in the centre of the Square. Lenin's tomb of austere design in red Italian granite stands out sharply against the dark fir-trees planted along the pink walls of the Kremlin. The tribune is as yet empty. Above the crenellated Kremlin walls rise the white turrets, the green fish-scale roof tiles and clustering golden domes of the Kremlin against a lovely background of blue cloudless sky. From the highest point of all a scarlet flag strains in the wind. The empty Square looks even vaster than it is. At the left entrance to the Square stands the ancient cathedral of Saint Basil, its eerie domes each different from the other. Madame Borodina never looked at it without a shudder.

yet she had to look. Saint Basil's has all the horrible fascination of a sorcerer's castle. She remembered the legend of the omnipotent Tsar who had ordered its construction and who was so jealous of it that he had the eyes of his architect put out lest he repeat his masterpiece. Was it only a legend? thought Madame Borodina, looking again, despite herself, at the beautiful horror.

The silence, which had been growing more intense, was shattered by the Kremlin chimes intoning the hour. As the bells tolled, the leaders of the Government took their places on the tribune. Directly opposite, Madame Borodina could see them all plainly. In the centre stood Stalin, grave and imperturbable in white summer uniform. Beside him Molotov, Kaganovitch, and the shrewd old peasant leader Kalinin. Then there were the foreign Ambassadors—English, French, German, American, Chinese, Italian, with their military attachés.

Again a sudden silence. Then a military band thundered out the music of the "International," and in step with the music, Marshal Klim Voroshilov, mounted on a superb white charger, cantered across the whole length of the Square (which was lined with Red Army men standing stiffly to attention), saluting the tribune with drawn sword. A roar of cheering burst from the crowd—the parade had begun.

First came the military display, squadrons of heavy and light tanks racing by in precise formation, then heavy field artillery and mobile anti-aircraft guns and lines of gun carriers, military lorries and ambulances, whilst overhead roared endless formations of fighters and bombers, swooping low like birds, momentarily darkening the sky. Then came the Red cavalry, galloping at full speed with drawn sabres, their horses with gleaming flanks and flying tails. Great waves of cheering rose and fell like an incoming tide. Cameramen darted about the Square taking photographs. Detachments of the Red Army marching with fixed bayonets and squadrons of air force men now swung proudly through the Square, eyes directed towards the Tribune where Stalin stood at the salute. The parachute corps raised an extra burst of cheering. Then came the naval units in their spruce uniforms, long ribbons floating from their jaunty round caps. Then the honoured regiments of the Soviet Home Guard, older, sterner men wearing civilian clothes and carrying rifles, men who had fought on the barricades in 1917; some had even taken active part in the 1904 uprisings.

But this was a *May Day* demonstration, and the military parade, impressive though it was, was not of the proportion or significance it assumes on the 7th November anniversary parade.

In the pause before the next part of the parade, cleaners leapt out from nowhere and busied themselves rapidly with wide brooms and sprinklers, making the great Square clean again.

Now came the industrial workers and all the trades and professions of Moscow—a vast unending ribbon of marching men and women, grouped in close formation behind the scarlet banners proclaiming their factory and their output, whilst bands played and the spectators cheered.

Now it was the turn of the sports organizations. This is always a brilliant spectacle and the crowds stirred expectantly. Thousands of the youth of Moscow took part in this display, sturdy bronzed lads, clad only in white shorts and plimsolls, girls in white sports vests and shorts marching by like a new kind of army, as indeed they were. When the Square was filled the procession halted whilst they gave their display, meticulously timed and executed, thousands moving as one, slipping and melting into starshapes and circles and squares, reforming ranks, stretching themselves out on the asphalt to do complicated athletic movements, all in perfect time to gay music.

Now came the educational workers from museums, schools, universities. Madame Borodina, tears of pride in her eyes, reached forward to wave to her husband marching stiffly behind the banner of the Folk Museum (it was a gift from Bokharrian artists who had specially designed and embroidered it). There was a beautiful group from the Mother and Child Museum, for the staff had brought their own children along and carried them pick-a-back, the little ones throwing flowers. Now delegations from the Republics of the national minorities fill the Square—Kirghizians, Uzbeks, Tadjiks, Kazakhs, Turkmenians, Armenians, Georgians, Ukrainians and the others.

Now the floodgates are open, and it seems as though an unending torrent of living beings is pouring through the Square—scarlet banners tossing like bright rafts on a surging sea ; there are flower-covered chariots and large satiric effigies of fascist monsters (in the tireless papier-mâché tradition of the carnival *niçois*) and more scarlet banners and more streamers and thundering bands and immense portrait-banners of their chosen Soviet leaders, Lenin, Stalin, Voroshilov.

Many of the workers carry smaller picture-banners mounted on gauze and held high above their heads. The Square looks like a moving flower-bed.

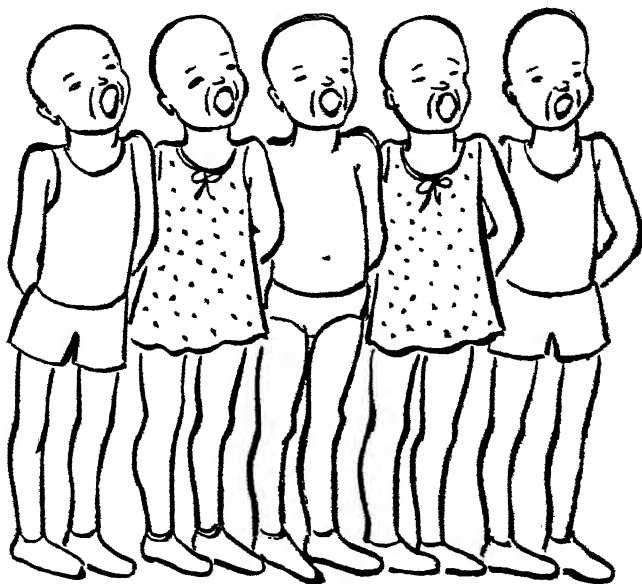
For hours the procession surges by. Tirelessly Stalin, pipe in mouth, stands with his colleagues on the tribune, pointing out incidents to each other, comparing, laughing and waving.

To a little group of English tourists watching from a top window of the new Moscow Hotel just on the other side of the Moscow River it seems as though the whole world is in deluge. They can see four streams of people converging from different streets behind Saint Basil's Cathedral into one immense river to pour through the Square. At half-past five they are still watching and the flood seems in no way abated.

"How many would you estimate, Professor?" asks an American student.

"About three million, I guess," replies Professor Samuel Harper of Chicago University. And an untidy Cambridge don wipes his glasses and murmurs, "Dear me—and we are told the Russians can't organize."

Before this Madame Borodina had already made her way to an arranged rendezvous where her neighbours and her husband and Petka were waiting. They had eaten sandwiches and fruit, but she had been too excited to eat anything. Petka persuaded her to have a glass of tea and a butterbröt



before they started the evening's fun. They were off sight-seeing. On the Moscow river embankment, piles of paper ornaments, torn banners and coloured favours were heaped to be carted off before the day was out. Groups of tired people in gay clothes were resting themselves. Every street, every building, every house in Moscow was decorated. The whole city was *en fête*, and as the brief spring evening approached millions of coloured lights flashed out over the city, whilst high above the Bolshoi Opera House the darkness was stabbed by great searchlights forming in Roman numerals the number of years since the Revolution.

There was so much to look at and enjoy. The Metro had a gorgeously illuminated working model of itself in the Theatre Square that Petka could not be wrenched from until he saw a large circle forming round some

Ukrainian dancers. He seized Sasha's mother (who was dressed in her native Ukrainian holiday clothes and kerchief) and whirled her into the centre. Notwithstanding the fatigues of the day the good lady put up so gallant an effort that Petka was forced to drop out panting before she did. The accordions took a fresh breath and started off again. Other dancers took their place in the centre of the laughing, stamping, clapping circle.

The blue night air vibrated as with electricity. There was gaiety and laughter in every street of the capital as the people took possession of their beloved city. Every café and restaurant was crowded. Dancing groups formed spontaneously at every corner. Outdoor cinema shows were projected on to giant screens fastened on the outside of buildings. Everywhere music and singing, and in the Park of Rest and Culture a great firework display was just starting to reflect its story in the Moscow River below.

It was time to go to the station where Sasha's modest luggage was waiting. Ludmilla clung to his arm as they made their way through the dancing hilarious crowds. They would travel all night and reach Leningrad in the morning and spend one night in Leningrad. Sasha would be off by boat on the following morning and Ludmilla would return alone to Moscow. Her heart was filled with many conflicting emotions; pride at her Sasha being chosen, distress at thought of their separation, excitement over the holiday, responsibility for her own job and her baby to come. So Sasha chatted and she remained silent.

"And we shall see your old Uncle Fedor and Auntie Sofia, Miliushka, to-morrow for sure. Won't that be fun?"

She nodded.

"Wouldn't it be wonderful if we get seats at the Marinsky? I know you'd like that," went on Sasha. "We shall feel like provincials in Leningrad, shan't we?" he continued, trying not to talk about England until Ludmilla felt more composed.

They had long been separated from the rest of their party by the crowds, but Sasha had told them the time the train left, and sure enough when they arrived at the platform there they were awaiting them, laden with flowers and presents and knobbly little parcels of delicacies and bon-bons for the journey. Papa Vassiliev collected Sasha's luggage and hired pillows and clean bed-linen, neatly wrapped in cellophane paper. Sasha and Ludmilla were bundled into the right compartment and the numbers of their two bunks carefully checked by the guard. Almost at once the whistle blew. Sasha, towering above his throng of relatives and friends, gave his final hugs and messages. They were off. They hung out of the carriage window as the train gathered speed, waving and waving at the vanishing group of dear faces till the train rounded a corner and they disappeared into the darkness.

"Now they will go home to have supper and make Madame Borodina rest, and off they'll go to the Park till all hours," grinned Sasha. Ludmilla was already unpacking food and arranging everything comfortably. The other passengers were friendly. Before long they were all sharing each other's food and talking. The steward brought round glasses of tea and boiling water and presently returned to make up their beds for the night. Everyone settled down comfortably, not yet to sleep however. Russians are essentially sociable creatures; so they talked freely about everything under the sun. Presently one of the passengers took down his guitar from the rack and they all sang softly in the darkness, whilst the train roared and rattled on through the night towards the Arctic circle.

Ludmilla woke with a start. The sun was streaming through the carriage windows and Sasha, already dressed, stood gazing down at her, a glass of tea rapidly cooling in his huge hand.

"Are we there already?" she cried, springing up and reaching for her dressing-gown.

"Almost," said Sasha. "Here's tea for you, darling. I've been watching you ever so long. You looked so peaceful sleeping there like a little dormouse. I hadn't the heart to waken you up."

Ludmilla gulped down the tea and dressed in two minutes. With a grinding of brakes and a shrill of released steam the train drew up. They had arrived. Before they had sorted out their packages a weatherbeaten workman with snow-white hair and a smiling old woman peeped anxiously into their compartment.

"Uncle! dear dear Uncle Fedor! And darling Auntie!" cried Ludmilla, flinging herself upon them joyfully.

"See, here is Sasha, my husband. Oh, I've so much to tell you."

Sasha bowed and shook hands with the old man who frowned shrewdly at him and then gave him a friendly dig in the ribs.

"Sasha, hey? Engineer I'll be bound, and from the Ukraine by the looks of you. Well, lad, you are welcome. What do you say, Sofia?"

The old woman extended both arms and gave Sasha a hearty kiss on both cheeks.

"And now what do you mean by arranging to stay at a hotel? We could have put you up. At least you shall eat with us, dear children. Sofia has been preparing dainties for days and you remember how well she cooks—just such another as your own dear mother, and how is *she*?" Talking and bustling the old man had gradually got them and their belongings on to the platform and into a taxi. First they drove to the hotel. The Europa was a survival of the old days and marked by opulence rather than good taste. At the entrance three giant bears reared menacing stuffed



heads and glared out of their glass eyes. Sasha gave instructions for their luggage to be sent up to their room.

"A drink," he suggested. "Uncle Fedor, beer? Tea, Auntie Sofia? Coffee? An ice-cream?"

They took the lift up to the roof-garden overlooking the city. Many people were sitting at the little tables enjoying the fresh morning air. Leningrad was still *en fête*; the streets were bright with fluttering flags, banners and scarlet bunting. They could see the golden spire of St. Isaac's Cathedral against the green-blue northern sky and the magnificent sweep of the stately harbour.

"Children," mused Uncle Fedor, "I remember when this hotel was



nothing but a hotbed of intrigues and scandal, crawling with spies and cardsharps and harpies of useless society women blazing with jewels.

"We poor Petersburg metalworkers used to be kicked out of the way when their sleighs drove past, and while we lacked bread to fill our bellies we had the honour of watching consignments of costly food pouring in here for their banquets. There are still some of the old butlers left. They could tell you some tales. Now most of the visitors here, apart from some foreign visitors and tourists, are delegations of workers and peasants from all over the country. What a change, my lad, what a change!" and Uncle Fedor took a long pull at his beer and puffed at his pipe reminiscently. "You young people weren't born then. Sometimes I feel that the days we lived and fought through in 1917 gave us something no one else who came after can ever understand. Isn't it so, Sofia? But it was for you youngsters that we fought, so that you should live happier lives than we used to. Eh, lad?"

There was one hotel, I remember, where the manager barricaded the doors during the shooting and herded the guests into the billiard-room for safety. The staff had all gone out on to the streets to join the workers. The furnace was unlit and the hotel like ice. Soon there was literally nothing left in the hotel to eat or drink but caviar and champagne—no meat, no fish, no bread even. So they had to live on iced champagne and caviar and caviar and iced champagne for days. When we build new hotels for the workers, Alexander Constantinovitch," he said, turning to look round the roof-garden, "we must make them big and fine, but more dignified than this. Eh? See, your Auntie Sofia has got a surprise for you."

Auntie Sofia, having drained her glass of tea, had solemnly put her hand into her skirt pocket.

"Oh! what is it, Auntie?" cried Ludmilla.

Slowly Auntie Sofia drew out her treasure—a white envelope. Ludmilla opened it wondering, faintly suspecting. It was—indeed it was—two tickets for the Marinsky theatre that evening. Ludmilla blushed with pleasure and clapped her hands like a child. She knew how difficult it was to get tickets for the Marinsky, especially during the holidays, and she guessed that Uncle Fedor, who was a veteran home guard and much honoured in his factory, had been presented with the tickets as a special treat for himself and his wife.

"O!" was all she could say. "What is it to-night?"

"It's the 'Corsair'," said Auntie Sofia eagerly. "No beating the classics to my mind, though I must say 'Flames of Paris' moved me very much indeed, and I hear the 'Fountains' is beautiful beyond words. How could we let you come to Leningrad and not see the ballet? No, no. And now let us have your company, my dears, while we may. Let's walk gently home and have dinner, shall we? The Neva is quieter to-day. A week ago you should have seen her—boiling and tossing madly with great ice floes crashing and grinding against the bridges. We crowded the parapets to watch. Ah, you don't know what spring means, you sleepy old Muscovites!"

"Corsair" was indeed a classic of purest Byronic inspiration. The very *corps de ballet* seemed softened and rounded into lissom melancholy phantoms of the early nineteenth century; against backgrounds of romantic caverns and Eastern bazaars the ballet gracefully unwound its four-hour length.

The première ballerina, in the pearls and draperies of an houri, postured seductively upon a silken dewan in the robbers' lair, and as the moment approached for her famous solo the atmosphere in the theatre perceptibly tightened. For the Marinsky audience, in broadening itself from the ranks of the workers, had lost none of its balletomane fire from the times when

Leningrad was Petrograd and before that when Petrograd was St. Petersburg and the Capital. Now the prelude to the solo was being played and the audience held its breath.

The première ballerina, with indescribable grace, uncoiling herself from the dewan, ran upstage where, poised exquisitely, she braced herself to meet the electric surge from the darkened auditorium. The solo began, launching her tempestuously into a sustained series of the most intricate and difficult movements known to choreography. The audience, who understood the technique of every gesture, true to tradition shattered the air with wild applause which rose and fell, continuously clapping with their myriad hands until the ballerina was dancing to the applause while the orchestra played unheard within the applause. Finally in a dizzying whirl of white chiffon and pink toe-shoes the solo ended. The ballerina tripped to the footlights where she melted into an exquisite curtsey, her slender arms gracefully encompassing the whole theatre. The audience rose cheering to its feet and bouquets of flowers rained upon the stage.

"There, what did I tell you, Sashinke. Nothing like the Marinsky, is there?" murmured Ludmilla, as they walked back to the hotel at midnight, and she hugged his arm. Life was full of good things. They went into the restaurant for supper. It was as crowded as though it were dinner-time, and long after they had gone to bed parties of theatre-goers and workers making merry still thronged the tables and consumed vast plates of *rassolnick* soup and *soudak* and the inevitable *compôte*.

Ludmilla was up early next morning, neatly repacking Sasha's suitcase for his journey. Auntie and Uncle were coming to have breakfast with them, and then they were all going to the quayside to see Sasha off. She had given him as a farewell gift a new edition of Pushkin's poems bound in red leather and tooled with gold, and she was busy packing it where he could get at it easily on the voyage. "Why, Sashinke, whatever is this?" she exclaimed, seizing on Doctor Kravchenko's book.

Sasha turned pink and explained. Ludmilla put her arms round him, laughing but very near tears.

"You are a sweet old cuckoo," she said, "that's what you are. Oh," she cried suddenly, straightening out her firm young body. "Oh, Sasha!"

"Why, whatever's the matter, Miliushka."

"Sasha—the baby—I felt something—it *moved*—it really moved, it did. Oh, wonderful—it was like . . . like the flutter of a little tiny bird, or . . . or a fish. . . . I can't describe it, Sasha, but it moved—my baby—it's really there, and it's alive."

And they looked at each other in wonder and delight as though they were the first father and mother in the world.

## VII

### *Letters*

"SMOLNY."

LUDMILLA !—I am writing on the boat. The steward says this can be posted from Kiel Kanal. I have made friends with the Captain—he's a fine fellow—bigger even than me—Ukrainian, of course. This ship is a Soviet community and everything seems as familiar as our factory—Red corner and chess, rifle practice and meetings and so on.

I am studying English as hard as I can for I am determined to do well. How are you, my darling? Write soon and write often and write a lot.

Give my greetings to everyone and for yourself all my love—*all*.—Your husband,  
SASHA.

ENGLAND.

LUDMILLA !—We are getting near to England now. I am quite excited. It is shrouded in a grey mist. I wonder is it always like this? The Captain says "No, but it rains a lot." It had been a pleasant voyage. I have been practising my English on the returning tourists, but they do not know Miss Parker's sister in Notting Hill Gate. However, London is very large. Did you get my letter posted from Kiel?

I watched the German customs men at Kiel Kanal and a few Nazi sailors with much curiosity. They seemed efficient and mechanical. The first fascists I have seen—horrible to think of that large country with all its workers fettered in such superstitious tyranny.

I read the ship's news bulletins daily. The political situation grows daily darker over Europe, my darling. When will the clash come?

We are nearing the harbour now; I must stop. England looks damp and grey but somehow strong and full of promise.—Your husband,  
SASHA.

STRETTFORD,  
MANCHESTER.

LUDMILLA,—Well, well, here I am at last. I am already working at Metro-Vickers. It is very absorbing and the British engineers are expert at their trade. I wish my English was better, but I shall learn soon, now alas, I have no one to talk Russian with. I have found a room at the home

of one of the engineers here. It is so tiny you wouldn't believe. All these people live in the smallest tiniest houses (like two matchboxes, one on top of another) in the suburbs. All the streets in the suburbs are exactly alike (I often lose my way). I cannot understand how the English can build such tiny houses—better one large room if space is lacking ; so much work for the housewives. The poor creatures spend all their days brushing and dusting and cooking for one man and perhaps one child.

Mr. and Mrs. Johnson are surprised because I am big. They said they thought all Russians were small and dark and had beards.

It is a curious way we live here—no crèches and no kindergartens, at least not in the suburbs where they are needed most. So I feel socially the English are not so advanced, though in technical skill they are ahead of us.

Mrs. Johnson is nice but shy. She is going to have a baby in a few months. She hardly goes out. I tell her she must have fresh air, but she says in England it is not considered polite for a woman who is going to have a baby soon to be seen out-of-doors. I feel this must be an exaggeration, though it is true I have seen no pregnant women in the streets and the buses have no seats reserved for them.

I miss our theatres very very much, but I believe that Manchester has good concerts. I shall go at the first opportunity. Dear Ludmilla, I work hard but I feel very strange here somehow. I feel like a man from another world, as I suppose I really am. I kiss you. I am glad you will be having our baby in our own dear country. I cannot imagine what you would do here.—Your husband,

SASHA.

P.S. Send me *Pravda*, please. I hunger for news in Russian.

P.P.S. They don't play football in the summer ; Grisha was right. They've asked me to join a golf club. It is a curious game. And I have joined a swimming club.

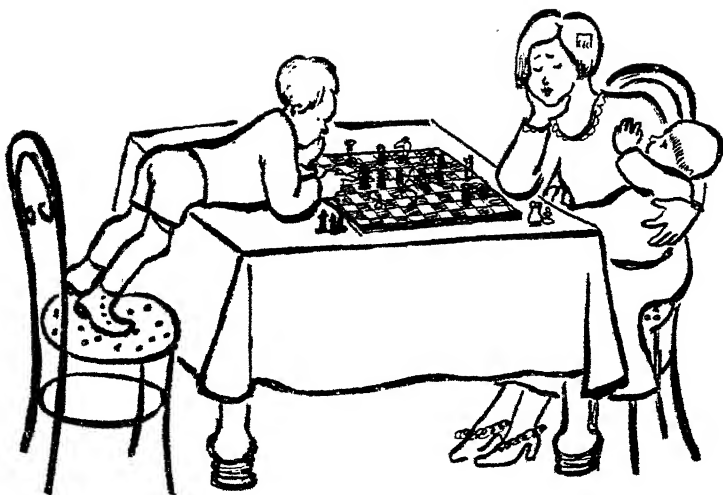
P.P.P.S. The English are good gardeners. You should just see the lovely flowers Mr. Johnson grows in his tiny patch of garden.

AUTONOMOUS REPUBLIC OF  
BURYAT-MONGOLIA.

*Ulan-Bator.*

WELL, SASHA, OLD MAN,—There you are shrouded in British mists, I suppose, whilst here we are camping on the endless steppes on the top of the world, or so it looks. One can see as far as a hawk in this clear air. South of us lies the Gobi desert and south of that China. East of us is Manchuria. I wouldn't give a kopek for the lives of any Japanese soldiers who screwed up their audacity to start poking their noses into our Soviet territory up here, believe me. We soldiers are in splendid trim. We lead





an active social and educational life too, as well as plenty of training. There is a wonderful native theatre here, which has come on tremendously under the régisseur sent out from Moscow . . . an interesting fellow with a jolly American wife. She started her baby here and had him in Moscow. Though she is game for anything, and I have no doubt would have had him in a *yurt* (native tent) and brought up on mare's milk quite happily. Horses are everything here. All the native population lives on horseback. They're nomads, dark-skinned with slanting eyes—fond of beads and embroidered skins. This is the country of Ghenghis Khan. I believe there's an excellent book about him written by an English writer named Ralph Fox. Our Commandant told us about it in our literature class. Said he met Fox during the Civil War in Spain. Ralph Fox was a political commissar in the international brigade. He was killed early in the fighting—quite a young man still. Try to get the book, Sasha. You ought to be able to read English well by now.

As to your last move—put this in your pipe, my son—you overlooked the attacking strength of my King's Bishop. I have pushed it forward to cover my King from your Queen. And if you don't admit you're licked now, send me what feeble move you can counter in your next letter. Shouldn't take more than a few weeks to reach me.

There's a native horse-racing contest to-morrow we are all invited to. Great local event, and people are pouring in from all over the place. This is the life, my boy. I've got out the old accordion all ready. We move camp to Lake Baikal next month.

What would you say if I brought home a Buryat bride?

GRISHA.

RED STAR SANATORIUM,  
CAUCASUS.

DEAR LUDMILLA,—Well, here we are at Kisslovodsk at last. We had a pleasant journey, Petka and I. You know how he looks after me like a nana. I am feeling very strong and active already, but he fusses over me like an old hen really and won't let me do any walking. "Wait until the Professor comes," he says each time I protest. And he comes this week when he has arranged everything to his satisfaction at the Museum, so I hope to have a more active life then. Of course it's quite heavenly just to lie in a wicker lounge-chair on the balcony in the bright sunshine and look over the glorious view. The mountains are so beautiful, with their white snow-caps against the bluest sky I have ever seen, and the vegetation here is most brilliant. Petka is off next week on a workers' tourist climbing expedition with a native guide and a jolly party of boys and girls. He says he will go into training if he likes it and will try to climb Mount Elbus next. I hope he is only joking, but who knows?

Dear little Ludmilla, what a wonderful life you young people have nowadays. You are all so independent and assured and you make such good relationships with each other. I watch from my balcony and I find my eyes filling with tears sometimes to see these gay parties of youngsters setting off each morning. I remember my papa bringing us to the Caucasus when I was a girl . . . Feodosia it was. But in those days we had no freedom at all. We were not allowed even to go for a walk without a chaperone, and never, *never* allowed to meet any young men except those chosen by my father when he considered it a suitable *parti*. Luckily father died before he had married me off to some horrid red-faced subaltern because of his estates. But I never enjoyed our holidays much, I remember. Boris was fighting in the Civil War when he was your age, so he comes into this Soviet inheritance as a mature man, at the end of the summer instead of in the spring-time. But I praise God always that in the winter of my life I should be alive to see the wonderful new people who are growing up and making our country so happy and (does it sound banal?) so *sensible*. There was always so much waste and futility and so much cruelty in my young days. Of course I'm not much use myself, I know, but I am the wife of a very distinguished man and the mother of a brilliant son, and I'm so proud of them both. And then there's dear Petka, who is a second son to me. I must stop now. The bell has gone for lunch. The food is simply delicious, and the melons! I suppose I really ought not to eat so many, but they are irresistible.

Look after yourself well, dear Ludmilla. I think of you so much and your little baby to be. I am embroidering him a roubashka. It will be a race between us as I am so slow at my sewing, but I



am determined it shall be ready for his arrival.—Always your loving friend,  
ELIZAVETTA IVANOVNA BORODINA.

MOSCOW.

(*Evening in our room.*)

SASHA !—Already it is summer. The gardens of Serpuchovka Boulevard are looking lovely—a blaze of flowers. There are big arguments going on as to whether pansies are quite suitable for street gardens. Some people think they look a bit effeminate. But they do look nice, so why not? I wear my new *sarafan* a lot now the weather is so warm and our little baby begins to grow more and more. I feel sure she is a daughter. I do want a daughter so. Mamma and I are such good friends and I want to be the same to my daughter. So let's have a girl first and then a son after, shall we?

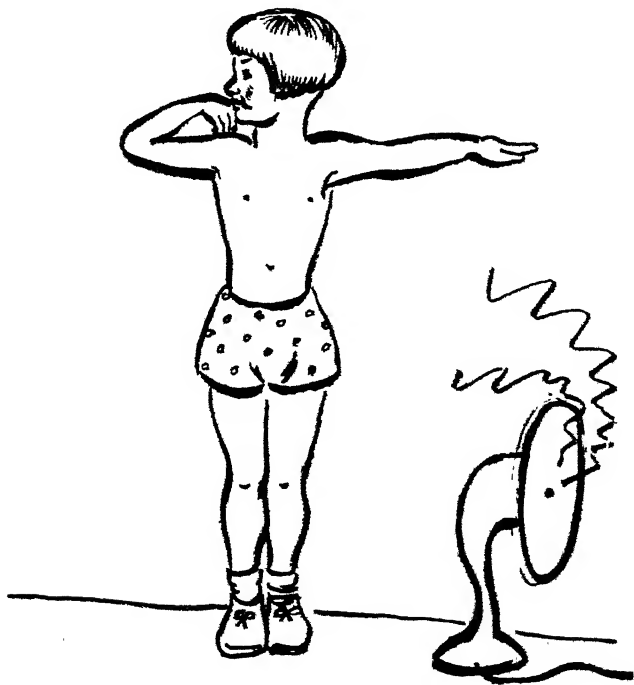
Everyone is specially nice to me, although so many of the girls at work are having babies too. We make lots of jokes about it, and say our Iskra textile factory has the foremost output of cotton prints and babies in the U.S.S.R.

I am feeling marvellously well, so energetic and happy. I wish I could write poetry. It is all in my head, but instead of coming out in rhymed lines it goes into the whizzing spindles or into a burst of energy for sports. Still I *read* a lot of poetry. It all seems to have so much more meaning now somehow. I have a new assistant at the factory now, Maria Bogdanovna. She is soon to have her fifth child. The poor woman—her husband deserted her some time ago, but he's back now, and they are trying again. I hope they will make a better go of it this time. She says he's trying hard to qualify for a better job than night-watchman. She has just recently been promoted herself. She's a bit old-fashioned in some ways, but she is a hard worker and willing to learn.

Mamma is in fine form and Polina is growing so fast that we think she will become a giant like you. She has just bought a ticket for the Soviet State Lottery out of her pocket-money. All her school are buying them and feeling very patriotic. When I asked her what she would do if she won a big prize she had no idea, except to buy us all presents. So I told her she could always buy some books or gramophone records for the Pioneer Red Corner. Funny child, isn't she? She's outgrown her passion for stamps, and taken up parachute-jumping now. She has practised quite a lot from the tower already. She says she will try to learn to fly before me and tell me what it feels like! Grisha writes regularly. He seems to be enjoying Buryat-Mongolia . . . what fun if he should bring home a Buryat-Mongolian bride! He's rather shy, poor old Grisha is, as you

know. Maybe he could get along better with a girl if they had no common language to speak in. It's the sort of thing Grisha would do, don't you think? Like the way he always uses his accordion as conversation.

Boris is in Berlin but expects to be coming to London quite soon. I have sent him your address. You must see him there. That will be so nice for you both. Do write and tell me all about it. I read your letters over many times, darling Sasha, and carry them about in my pocket for days to read



again at every spare moment, like a silly girl instead of a responsible married woman who is almost a mother.

Madame Borodina isn't very well, I'm afraid. She's been on holiday in Kisslovodsk and seemed to be improving at first, but after that she's been rather ill again. She's back home now. We try to make her rest as much as we can. She's such an angel and everyone loves her dearly. She seems so fragile beside us healthy things. Mamma makes her all sorts of dainties to tempt her appetite but she eats no more than a bird.

Doctor Kravchenko is looking after us and you know how competent she is. Leonid has several more teeth and a lot more conversation now. He grows so handsome. This mixed blood gives good results, doesn't it? Are the English a good-looking race? They're very mixed, aren't they?

See what nonsense Hitler talks . . . on our very own landing we have proof in Leonid of the soundness of racial mixtures—not that anybody takes Hitler's theories seriously. I hope none of the English people do, dear Sasha.

Kravchenko and Petka work all hours of the night these days. They are getting to a crucial stage of his invention. He says it's only a matter of weeks now.

I shall be going on my summer holidays quite soon, darling. Mamma can't get away yet—she's leaving hers till later—early autumn. Her babies are all going away for the summer and she wants to reorganize the school kitchen in the next block. I shall be going down to the Crimea this year for my month. Doctor Kravchenko will be staying at another rest-home nearby and we shall travel down together. Kravchenko can't be torn from his blueprints yet. I'll write you from there, dearest Sasha.

All our love. Baby sends you a wriggle.—Your

LUDMILLA.

KURFURSTENDAMM,  
BERLIN.

FATHER !—Here is one of the rare letters from your errant son who usually prefers to use the telephone or telegram to convey his news. But to-night, dear Father, I feel suddenly weary of Western Europe and must write to my home to take away the taste of it. You remember I was here in Berlin for a while with you during the inflation. I get the same horrible feeling now of a country boiling up to a volcanic eruption. Everyone is so tense and provocative. If only this mood could be pricked before it drags the world into another and bloodier war. But the rest of Europe seems paralysed. If only England would make a move to stop Hitler, but with Chamberlain in office there will never be a united front against fascism. Crazy though Hitler is he wouldn't attempt to defy the united forces of the whole world at this stage. But shortsightedness is so much more prevalent than foresight, I doubt if anything will be attempted before it is too late.

I've just come from a smart party at Baronin P——'s. They were all criticizing our U.S.S.R., each from his own point of view. They are so tied to decaying Europe that they can't realize what is happening in our country. Such criticism ! One or two elegant young subalterns thought we were too severe on paederasty . . . another (a magazine editor) thought we were prudish . . . another (a virgin spinster) objected to our anti-abortion laws. Another (a man-about-town) thought our women didn't dress well and was scornful that we had done away with prostitution. He

said no woman who worked could devote herself to being elegant, and to be elegant is the prime function of woman. He was joking, I suppose, yet he wasn't joking. How can I answer these people? They are hopelessly part of a system in decay, and one can only answer in set hard-boiled phrases. What would they make of someone like our dear Ludmilla in her blue silk best dress, I wonder? They are a poisonous lot, carping and unhappy and introverted. I can never explain our Soviet people to them. I hate this kind of sophistication, Father. I can chatter their sort of chatter well enough, as indeed I have to so much of my time away from home, but now and again a flood of revulsion sweeps over me and I hate the lot of them. Europe is on the edge of a violent change, but Hitler's dreams won't cure this sort of thing. He is more neurotic than they are. He is their man in fact. The violence and hatreds and hysteria of National-socialism appeal enormously to these jaded wordlings. Hitler will have staunch allies in society ladies in every country, believe me. I stuck it as long as I could, and here I am back in my hotel room with a nice beautiful black *cafard*, pouring out my heart to you like an emotional schoolboy. How I wished I could have produced our Petka to blast them into silence with one of his bursts of bad language. But no, your Boris did the polite most meticulously . . . bowed and chatted, kissed the ladies' hands and preserved the decorum due from the representative of a great power's foremost newspaper. But I cleaned my teeth when I got back here. Now I take myself to bed with an armful of books as usual. I'm reading Flaubert again. And if I have to go to any more of these damnable smart parties I'll take Gibbon's *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* to bed with me. It's a treat I've been promising myself for twenty years or so, dear Father.

There, I feel better now. I didn't send you the prints you wanted because they are unobtainable. Grotz is now on the official list of banned artists. The assistant turned quite pale when I asked for prints of his drawings, and shook his head nervously without a word. I inquired from other sources and gather poor old Grotz is in America now, drawing for "Vanity Fair" I believe. But oh, Father, the prints they did have in that art-shop. Oh, the benighted flowerings of Nazi art! Horst Wessel resurrected in bilious madders. So you see what becomes of being too snobbish to be a house painter.

There, enough! I go to my bed beneath the glazed eye of Hindenburg framed in gilt. They've decorated the airdrome reception hall here with little bronze busts of Adolf, moustache and all, down to the last hair. The Teutons never did have any sense of humour, did they?

How is Mamma? Give her a special kiss from your devoted but fed-up son,

BORIS.



ARBAT,  
MOSCOW.

SASHA, MY SON,—I take up my pen to write to you after supper. Your mother is mending stockings. Everyone else is out except our little one, who is fast asleep in his cot. The girls have gone swimming at the Stadium swimming pool. The boys, I believe, are playing volley-ball. Only us old people are sitting quietly at home, thinking of you, their eldest son, so far away in a strange land.

Dear Sasha, we all miss you very much, although we are so busy with our work, and now the summer has come, so busy with our pleasures too. Your mother and I spent a delightful short holiday at a rest-home near Moscow last Rest-day. It was good to see Mother at rest for once, although, as you can well believe, when dancing started in the evening, she took her place with the best of them. There were many interesting people there and a very good lecture on foreign politics after dinner. The situation does not improve, dear son. It is horrible to contemplate another world war. Yet we are preparing and must be staunch to meet the threat which must eventually come to the frontiers of our dear land. This time will be different, boy. Our country is so united and eager to defend itself now. Never shall I forget the bad state of things on the Western front in 1917. I was, as you know, a corporal in the infantry then. We would not have

collapsed as we did if the profiteers and bureaucrats at home had at least kept us supplied with the wherewithal to fight. Packing-cases that reached us, instead of containing the food and ammunition we badly needed, were stuffed with bricks and rubble. Never shall I forget our lads, barefoot in the snow, going into action in rags without even a gun. And for what, dear son? To prop up Tsarism? We were only peasants, boy, but we weren't such fools as all that. Do you wonder we welcomed Lenin with such enthusiasm when he came—even those of us who were not politically conscious understood him and trusted him.

"Vote?" says Vladimir Illyitch, "but you see the army is voting. It's voting with its feet . . . it's going home. 'Peace and bread,'" says he. "That's what we want, brothers. And that we shall have . . . but not without fighting for it." And fight we did, my boy, as you know. But it was different fighting during the Revolution. We were fighting for ourselves and our children to come. And when we went hungry it was not to fill the bellies of profiteers with fancy food.

Now, how much stronger are we than we were. If any foreign glutton dares to set foot on our dear soil he will soon find out his error. I shall again take up my rifle and march out to meet the invader, and my sons and daughters will fight beside me, and to be sure your mother will not be left out.

Now tell us about yourself. I want to inquire after you and how you are getting on with your work. I know you are working hard and doing your utmost, for you always were one who gave of his best. Mother is anxious to know if English food agrees with you. We understand they don't have soup so much as we do. That is a pity. Nothing is so nourishing. We are sure the kind Mrs. Johnson looks after you well. Perhaps, dear son, the day will soon come when we shall be so technically advanced that the British will send their sons here to Moscow to study engineering. Then we can take care of their sons whilst they are studying.

By the way, do you remember me mentioning Klavdia Semyonovna, who is in charge of the garderobe at our factory? She was always singing, as you know. And she really has the voice of a nightingale, as pure and sweet as golden honey. Well, what do you think? She went to the Moscow Conservatoire for a test, and they were so pleased with her that she is to start training there at once. So she will work half-time at the garderobe and the rest of the day at the Conservatoire under the best music teachers. Who knows, boy? She may yet become an operatic star. We waste no talent in our country.

Now about Ludmilla. We go to see her very often and take her all your letters to read. She is looking very well and pretty (women do, you know, when they are going to have a baby; your mother always bloomed

like a young girl, I remember). She is going off on her holiday next week to the Crimea. I am sure it will do her good. Meanwhile we are awaiting our first grandchild just as impatiently as she is.

Mother and all of us join in sending you hearty Soviet greetings and all our dearest love,

PAPA.

MOSCOW.

DEAR EDITH,—I am writing at the open window of my room. How pleasant it is here now that summer has come, as usual with a rush. The Boulevard kiosks sell beautiful flowers, mostly my favourite stocks. All the children seem to be away at their summer camps and Moscow looks and sounds empty without them.

I am still busy tutoring—Red Army men mostly. They work hard and are so earnest it is a pleasure to teach them. Though I wish I were able to give them a better idea of English life and thought in general. It is a pity we are so cut off from Europe, yet I often feel Kipling would feel at home here. I made the acquaintance of one of the *Pravda* foreign correspondents here recently, Borodin by name (his father is the famous Professor Borodin of the Moscow Folk Museum). This journalist is just Kipling's type, if you understand me. An agreeable person, and refreshingly cosmopolitan. I sometimes fear I am becoming an alien provincial, for I am too tied to my time-tables to get away. When will I ever return home, I wonder? And I doubt, my dear Edith, if I should feel at home if I did. This is distressing, is it not? But don't think of me as repining. I am busy and happy and have more friends than I can cope with. By the way, do send me some good English knitting patterns for babies' bonnets, there's a dear. I want to knit one for a charming young textile worker who is to have her first baby in the autumn. I am determined to knit it a good sensible bonnet.

How is your garden looking, dear? Do cultivate aubretia in that sunny border by the lilac tree. Is your ranuncula coming along well? And I would advise you to try lupins even in your difficult soil if you can find a nice damp corner for them. I do ache for a bit of English garden sometimes, Edith. It's the only thing I really miss.

I hope Fred and the children are well. Certainly have John's tonsils out, and I shouldn't hesitate to cut Sylvia's hair short if I were you. That long heavy hair is so sapping on the child's strength, don't you think? I don't see why it shouldn't grow out curly again. Yours did.

Always your affectionate sister,

ETHEL.

MANCHESTER,  
ENGLAND.

DEAR GRISHA,—You've slipped up this time, old son. You forgot the Knight I had up my sleeve. Your fat Bishop won't protect you now. You are checked by my Bolshevik Knight and there's no escape.—Ho ! Ho !

SASHA.



## VIII

### *Crimean Holiday*

It was baking summer weather. Everyone wore cool white linen and canvas slippers except the children, who ran about naked but for a cotton loin-cloth and were soon sunburned a rich oven brown like sugar-buns. The ice-cream kiosks which had popped up all along the boulevards were busy from morning till night. Flowers abounded. The sky had lost its transparent blue-green of spring and glowed the richest cobalt. Thrice daily water-carts sprinkled the streets of Moscow. Schools were packing up for the summer, and the thousands of Pioneers who were departing to holiday camps made the railway stations echo with their songs and bands and cheering. The theatres were closing down for the summer, and the theatrical companies had already started taking their productions on tour.

In Mamma Pavlova's flat Ludmilla was busy packing for her holiday. Ludmilla had bought a new suit-case from the recently-opened multiple stores on Kuznetsky Most. Mamma Pavlova thought it handsome, though secretly she preferred her own large wicker travelling-basket. "I'm still a peasant at heart. I am used to having everything in wood or linen or birch-twigs," she said, folding a nainsook petticoat. "Though to be sure these days our peasant-girls are more fashionable than lots of us town-people, what with the monster harvests they are reaping and the big wages they get."

Ludmilla didn't pack much—a few summer dresses, and for the evening her beautiful fringed shawl of cream cashmere printed all over with flowers brilliant as a tropical garden—her *sarafan* (sun-dress) and bathing things, her light summer jacket and a few kerchiefs. The rest of the suit-case was crammed with books and food for the journey. Mamma Pavlova, who loved scent, slipped in a large bottle of cologne-water.

"I seem to do nothing but say good-bye to my darlings, one after another," sighed Mamma Pavlova. "First, off goes Grisha to Buryat-Mongolia . . . then Polina flies away to a farm in the Ukraine . . . now here is my Ludmilla off to the Crimea . . . and next month away I go myself. Truly we Russians spend half our lives in trains and boats. I suppose it is because our Soviet land is so large. Though Professor Borodin ~~did~~ tell me once of a family living deep in the taiga-forests of Siberia who



asked after the health of Tsar Alexander more than fifteen years after the Revolution. I should take some needlework with you, my pet. Otherwise you will be sure to run about too much, and that is not good for you so near your time."

"I shall keep my stern eye upon her," laughed Doctor Kravchenko, who was sitting waiting for Ludmilla. All she herself took was a small bag, but so many books and papers followed her by post that she always returned from her holidays with another suit-case full of them. "Well, dear people, are we ready at last?"



Off they started, through the flowering gardens of the house, past the little wooden open-air theatre in the grounds. The theatre was just putting on a play of Ostrovsky. The audience was beginning to fill up the benches under the trees, whose heavy summer foliage cast a pleasant shade. The red curtain was down and a few children, who had either just come back from their holidays or not yet gone, were busy handing round handwritten programmes. Mamma Pavlova and Kravchenko were returning to see this performance as soon as they had seen off Ludmilla and the Doctor, and one of the Pioneers politely reserved two seats for them.

The station was crowded. There was even a swarthy Gypsy family spread out on the platform, whether coming or going it was impossible to

tell. They carried bundles of bedding and an iron kettle, and the many children had spread themselves round their mother who was dreamily suckling a fat rather dirty baby. Many people returning from a day's excursion in the country carried leafy branches, so that the station looked like a forest in motion.

Doctor Kravchenko and Ludmilla settled themselves and their luggage comfortably on two berths of their compartment. It was a three days' journey to Sevastopol and from there they went on by motor-coach. Almost before they had time to settle themselves and kiss their good-byes, the train gave a hoarse whistle and plunged off.

Opposite them in the compartment sat a sunburned peasant-woman in a cotton-print dress and a white kerchief. Beside her was her daughter, a placid girl of seventeen, with yellow hair braided in two plaits which hung below her waist. They were soon chatting amiably together. The peasant-woman told them she was going to visit her sister who worked on a sugar-beet farm in the Black Earth region.

They all made themselves at home, shared their food and arranged their belongings neatly as in a caravan. The peasant-woman brought out sausages, honey and sugar-cakes, and a great loaf of rye-bread. The steward came round with boiling water and they made their own tea. Night came suddenly. The steward reappeared with bedding. Ludmilla snuggled between the fresh linen sheets, leaving the other three to go on talking. The train settled into a slow rhythmic motion—chug-chug, chug-chug, chug-chug, which was soothing as a lullaby. Ludmilla thought about Sasha and her coming child, and wondered if Sasha would manage to get home in time. It was a warm still night. The train windows were wide open, and through her half-closed eyes she could see a patch of dark sky sprinkled hazily with stars. She thought about the Moscow Planetarium where, with Polina, she had once attended an illustrated evening lecture on relative distances of the constellations. They had been so thrilled that they took Mamma Pavlova the next night. Then she thought of her mother and of the father she had never known, then again of her baby and so fell asleep.

It was morning when she awoke. The sun was already making the compartment quite hot. Doctor Kravchenko, with mathematical precision, was arranging breakfast. Ludmilla hurried to make her toilet. It was distinctly hotter than the previous day. She put on her low-cut sleeveless *sarafan* and unpacked a paper fan.

The train stopped at numerous villages during the day. At each stop a group of peasants were standing laden with hot roast chickens and baskets of fresh fruit. Lively bargaining went on.

Through the windows Ludmilla dreamily watched the landscape unroll

itself—mile upon mile of tall heavy corn beginning to yellow under the steady rays of the summer sun—snug wooden villages screened by copses of birch-trees—collective farms—machine-tractor stations—herds of cattle—geese on ponds. . . . The train chugged tirelessly on.

At noon on the second day the peasant-woman and her daughter began to pack their belongings ready to get out. Presently the train stopped at a village where the usual group of peasants was gathered, laden with roast chickens and hot pies for sale. The peasant-woman gave a cry of joy and hurried to embrace a buxom woman, who, with several young children and a sturdy peasant-lad with a knapsack, were waiting eagerly on the siding. The two women kissed on both cheeks. As the peasant-woman climbed off the train, the sturdy youth climbed on.

"My nephew, Yura, comrades," she called from the siding. "He had his nineteenth anniversary yesterday. He is going to Sevastopol to register for his military service." The boy smiled and bowed before turning to the window to wave farewell to his family.

"I thought I wanted to join the Navy," he remarked, when the train was in motion again, "but I've decided to join the Army. Not that there isn't plenty of glory in the Red Air Force too. It's difficult to decide, isn't it? Well, we shall see. My father was killed at Tannenberg and my Uncle Ilya (that's Auntie Shura's husband—she who just got off here) lost his right arm at the mutiny of the Potemkin. Mother is a shock-brigader on our beet-farm. She's equal to any man. There's no lack of spirit in my family you see, whether in peace or in war . . . and when I take my soldier's oath I mean to honour it as it should be honoured." In a ringing voice he declaimed :

"I, a citizen of the U.S.S.R. entering the ranks of the Workers' and Peasants' Red Army, do take the oath and solemnly swear to be an honourable, brave, disciplined and watchful fighter, to keep strictly all military secrets, to fulfil obediently all military regulations and the orders of my commanders, commissars and chiefs.

"I swear to apply myself conscientiously to acquiring knowledge of military affairs, to guard unsleepingly the military and national possessions, to remain devoted to my last breath to my people, to my Soviet Fatherland, and to the Workers' and Peasants' Government.

"I shall ever be ready at the command of the Workers' and Peasants' Government to go forward for the defence of my Fatherland—the U.S.S.R., and as a fighter of the Workers' and Peasants' Red Army, I swear to defend her with courage, with skill, with dignity and with honour, sparing neither my blood nor my life to achieve victory over the enemy.

"If of malice I betray this my solemn oath, then let me be visited with the strict punishment of Soviet Law, general hatred, and the contempt of all working people."

"Bravo!" cried Ludmilla.

Yura turned out to be a gay travelling companion. He sang Ukrainian songs in his throaty boy's baritone, told them long anecdotes about his village, and at each station-halt darted out for refreshments.

Again the long drowsy afternoon, reading, musing, sewing, taking short naps, drinking glasses of tea at every village stopping-place. Then the quick twilight and the brief velvet night dimmed by the warm summer mist hovering over the earth.

All the time it was getting warmer and warmer, as they neared the Southern coast. And the next morning Ludmilla awoke to find the train grinding to a halt at Sevastopol station. They had arrived.

Yura helped them to climb down, and handed their luggage out to them. "Come," he said, "let's breakfast together. If you are in no hurry permit me to show you the town. I know it well."

They followed him along the tiled platform, ornamented with palms, and out into the blazing morning sunshine. Ludmilla blinked at the whirl of heat, but Doctor Kravchenko, revelling in the warmth, moved her shoulders appreciatively like a cat settling on to a rug, and seemed to absorb the sun into her golden skin.

Yura led them into a restaurant near the station, where a sleepy waiter with black moustaches brought them tea and mineral waters and immense slices of water-melon. Then off they set under Yura's guidance to explore the town.

Sevastopol, like Toulon and Plymouth, is an up and down city, all little hills with round green gardens, the smell of shell-fish, and little shops selling trinkets. Waving palm-trees, spreading from pineapple-shaped trunks, grew in the public squares, and groups of sailors strolled about the town, long ribbons streaming from their jaunty hats.

But Yura had no eye for the ordinary everyday life of the town. He hastened to take them to inspect what he called the "Panorama." They went past the harbour in a clanging tram—Yura showed them where a Russian Admiral had once sunk his ship to block the harbour against invasion, and the hill where the British fought the Russians in 1852. Yura gravely ushered them into the Rotunda to see the panorama of the Crimean War. A white-haired lecturer was conducting a party of children round the scene, describing the campaigns.

"... and the English fought very bravely," he said. "It was here" (and he indicated the spot with his pointer) "that the English light brigade



charged to their death. There were no more than six hundred of them against greatly outnumbering Russian forces. They must have known the order was impossible to fulfil, yet they were so well disciplined and of such courage that they attempted the impossible. Such soldiers deserved better leaders, don't you think? At least we Russians know how to honour a brave adversary. I believe that the English lyric poet, Tennyson, wrote an ode in commemoration of this charge."

Ludmilla looked at the painted troops with deep curiosity. These little dabs of scarlet and white were Englishmen, the people amongst whom her Sasha was now living.

"... And it was in this campaign that the English nurse, Florence Nightingale, first came to organize proper hospital treatment for the wounded," went on the lecturer, taking his class with him as he walked. "Before that the nursing had been left to a few doctors assisted by untrained orderlies, and more wounded soldiers died of neglect than of their wounds."

"Shame we can't stop any longer. Florence Nightingale is a particular heroine of mine," said Doctor Kravchenko. "But we must catch our motor-coach in half an hour, and we have to collect our luggage first."

Yura regretfully led them out of the Rotunda into the increasing heat of the day, back to the station.

The motor-coach was crowded, but Yura managed to secure two front seats on the right-hand side.

"You must sit exactly here," he said solemnly. "Then you will see something wonderful quite soon," and he presented them with an armful of flowers in farewell.

The motor-coach, with a roar and a horrid smell of petrol, started off along the stony mountain road.

"Good-bye!" Yura called after them, waving his hand.

"Good luck!" they shouted back.

The heat was overpowering. Ludmilla leaned back limply against the leather seat and watched the landscape through half-closed eyes. They were tearing through mountainous country, barren and rocky, with sparse grey dusty grass. Upwards, constantly upwards they rushed along the merest track. The chauffeur, a cheerful red-faced fellow with a peaked cap askew on his tumbled hair, drove with one hand at breakneck speed. He kept a cigarette in his mouth, and was engaged in an animated argument with another man sitting beside him, who was wrapped in a long coat as though it were winter. The driver never seemed to look at the road at all. The coach bumped and bounced over the stones, swerved round corners at a lurch and mounted increasing gradients at a tempestuous speed.

Now they were ascending quite sharply between high peaks, so that no sky could be seen at all. The chauffeur turned round and invited Ludmilla to keep her eyes open for a treat.

At the top of the hill was a great archway. In another few seconds the coach passed through it, and Ludmilla caught her breath sharply at the view below. They were very high up in a narrow pass. Beneath them the landscape fell away abruptly to the sea, thousands of feet below. It was a scene of enchantment. The Black Sea sparkled and glittered in the sunshine like an open jewel case sprinkled with diamonds. The Black Sea met the vast blue arc of the sky on a violet horizon. They were too far off to see the white sails of the yachts, and the grandest of the white palaces on the sea-coast appeared no larger than playthings for dolls. The mountains rose sternly behind them. Between them and the sea the terrain descended in sweeping curves, clothed with dark cypresses and feathery pine.

The chauffeur, having stopped to let them admire the view, tilted his cap still farther over his ear and plunged down the gradient even more recklessly than he had come up. He had now reached a stage in his argument with his friend which required the use of both hands to enforce his points. The coach rocketted downwards, swaying madly from side to side like a spinning-top. No one seemed to mind.

Suddenly, with a screaming of brakes, they drew up at a tall white building. It had formerly been a monastery. Now it was being used as a restaurant. Ludmilla and the Doctor lunched in the cool tiled hall, below a vaulted ceiling painted deep blue with gilt stars. The chauffeur, having at last won his argument, was tossing down an immense pot of beer, whilst his friend was busy filling up the petrol tank of the coach.



Then the passengers climbed in, the driver drained the last drops of his beer before scrambling back to his seat, and off they rushed again.

The afternoon sun was high overhead when they arrived at their destination. Ludmilla was staying at a small Rest-home outside the village. Doctor Kravchenko was staying at another nearby. Doctor Kravchenko's Rest-home was much larger and luxurious. But Ludmilla preferred the simplicity of a camping holiday this year.

Ludmilla's Rest-home was named *Chasta Aga*. At the gateway a sun-burned young man in loose white clothes, with a G.T.O. (Ready for Labour



and Defence) badge in his buttonhole, welcomed them. It was the hour for the afternoon siesta and none of the guests were to be seen. The young man conducted Ludmilla to the bureau, arranged her papers and saw to her luggage.

"I'll show you your chalet now," he said. "And you'll see our Doctor this afternoon before tea."

And he led the way through the garden, dotted with palm-trees and garden seats, to a group of simple wooden buildings, painted white. "You will be sharing this dormitory with two other girls. They are very nice. They are Caucasians. Over there," he pointed across the garden, "is

our volley-ball court. You can turn out just before breakfast for morning jerks there if you feel energetic and if doctor says it's all right. There's our refectory and sun-balcony. We dance there in the evenings, and have cinema shows. The sea is just a minute away. You take that winding path through the pine-woods and that brings you out right on the beach. Go slowly with the sun. It's stronger here than you imagine. Expose your skin very gradually, won't you? Now I think you had better have a rest till tea-time. Then I'll introduce you at tea."

Ludmilla washed away the fatigue of her journey, undressed, wrapped herself in a thin peignoir, and curled up on the bed. She slept at once.

Afternoon tea at the *Chasta Aga* was as much an institution as in any well-conducted English menage, yet vastly different. The refectory was a large wooden building, with windows on one side and the other side quite open, like the front of a stage, giving on to a wide tiled balcony. Streams of sunburned young people gathered round the long tables and overflowed on to the balcony which was set out with round tables and wicker chairs. Tea was literally tea. Poured from giant kettles where it was freshly made, weak and fragrant, and, of course, drunk without milk.

The host introduced Ludmilla who felt at home immediately among the crowd of gay young people. Mostly they were factory hands like herself, with a sprinkling of clerical-workers. It was easy to guess, merely by looking, how long each had been at the *Chasta Aga*. Those newly arrived were only slightly or not at all sunburned; those who had been there a week were beginning to brown pretty well; those who had been there two weeks and three weeks were golden brown, and those who had been there a month or so and were about to begin to think of returning home were tanned the richest mahogany. Against these glowing skins the white clothes most of them wore looked almost blue. No one bothered about stockings or socks, and many of the youths wore only shorts.

After tea they dispersed in groups, strolling about the garden and in the pinewoods. The chess-fiends continued their skirmishes at the tables on the balcony, and quite a lot of young people went down to the beach for another swim. The host was umpiring a game of volley-ball between two exuberant teams. Some of the older guests played croquet.

Ludmilla called in on the rest-home doctor, who was a busy little woman in glasses. Doctor Kravchenko had already had a word with her. She suggested a régime of walking, swimming, resting, and a certain amount of P.T., which suited Ludmilla admirably. "And mind you go carefully with our Crimean sun," she counselled.

Ludmilla returned to her *châlet* to find her two room-mates who had just returned from their excursion. They introduced themselves Russian-fashion, exchanged bon-bons, and were soon gossiping together like old

friends. These two girls were theatre *régisseurs*. They were tall and brown, with melting dark eyes and black hair worn in long plaits. One of them, the younger, was married to a Russian engineer.

They took Ludmilla for a walk through the pinewoods before supper, and lingered so long in the fragrant coolness that they were late for their meal. When they entered the refectory they were greeted by a clamour of spoons banging all together on the tables. This undergraduate ceremony of reproof was performed for every latecomer. There weren't often many.

Ludmilla, who always had a good appetite, found herself eating more than usual despite the heat, for the air from the sea was fresh and invigorating. The plump waitresses heaped up her plate and beamed with pride when she finished the lot. "You must eat well," they said. "Then you will have a strong baby."

In the evening there was a cinema-show in the refectory followed by dancing. Then there was a popular concert by some Leningrad musicians in the village hall. For the more serious-minded there was a lantern-slide lecture on the Crimea by a visiting geologist.

Ludmilla, however, preferred to spend her first evening just wandering about with Dóctor Kravchenko. She had been twice to the Caucasus, but this was her first visit to the Crimea. So she threw her cashmere shawl round her shoulders, and arm-in-arm they took the path to the village.

The still night air vibrated with the incessant chirping of cicadas and the astringent odour of the pinewoods filled their nostrils. High overhead, above the sober cypresses, rode the moon, tawny as a pumpkin.

The village streets were narrow and winding, and the houses leaned towards each other across the streets so that the upper storeys were almost touching. With their clumsy wooden beams set in plaster and their archaic pointed eaves they looked absurdly Elizabethan. Beyond the village stretched the wide slopes of the vineyards and beyond the vineyards lay tobacco plantations.

The whole countryside bore evidence of the different peoples who in the past had invaded, conquered, and passed on. The Turks had left behind them tall white mosques with minarets. In the pinewoods were to be found ruins of graceful Greek temples. And all along the coast rose the ornate white palaces built at the command of the Tsar for himself, his brothers, his cousins, his aunts and his distant relations.

Half an hour before breakfast next morning Ludmilla woke as a whistle blew the summons to physical culture enthusiasts. She rose quickly, had a cold sponge-down, and hurried off in her *sarafan* to the volley-ball court, which, its high net taken down, served as an outdoor gymnasium.

Morning jerks were already in progress. The host, standing in the centre, directed the exercises. About twenty people of all ages marched

briskly round and round him, changing speed as he gave the word of command.

Ludmilla rather shyly joined the marching circle. She was in good condition, and went through all the exercises till the instructor suggested she drop out when they became too arduous. She watched the last quite difficult feats the others performed, longing to join in, but thinking the instructor knew best. She felt so well and strong that the approaching birth of her baby seemed no reason at all for not doing just what everyone else did. Still she was determined to be sensible about it.

It was pleasant out in the early morning sunshine, the air fresh and cool and the trees casting long blue shadows. Presently the dressing gong boomed, bringing the exercises to an end. The class broke up and made a dive for the shower-baths, Ludmilla amongst them.

How good it was to stand under the spray gradually turning the pointer to tepid then to cool then to stinging cold. Her two room-mates were taking their shower in the adjoining cubicle. They turned and splashed under the streaming water like two bronze goddesses. Ludmilla thought she had never seen such perfect bodies, not even in statues; they were both tall, with high full breasts, firm waists, strong rounded limbs tapering to slender wrists and ankles and supple long fingers and toes.

Yet they were not elegant figures in the fashionable sense. They had not the over-bred refinement of line we have learned to admire in Europe, that slightly decadent, attenuated symmetry which dress-designers postulate, and which, exquisite when dressed, looks merely famished and rickety when naked. These generous breasts suggested not a background for diamond necklaces but milk flowing into the mouths of suckling infants, and the broad shapely hips gave promise of uncomplicated birth.

"I wonder," thought Ludmilla, who was very interested in clothes, "whether the most beautiful bodies don't, after all, look best with nothing on at all."

"How uncooked I look," she said aloud, surveying her own white skin with grave dissatisfaction. "I must sunbathe seriously, though I'm afraid I shall never manage to bake myself such a lovely colour as you two."

"It's easier for us," laughed her room-mates. "You see Nature has given us a good start."

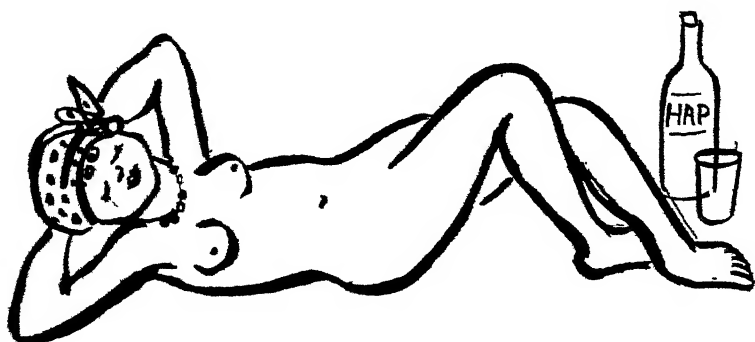
Her reflections were cut short by the breakfast gong. All three hurriedly finished their towelling and raced each other back to their chalet to throw on their frocks and be first at the breakfast table.

The morning sun was already mounting the sky and the shadows growing shorter. The refectory was lively with chatter as the tables filled up. The waitresses poured out tea and cut wedges of fresh rye-bread.

Ludmilla attacked her helping of smoked *soudak* (a Russian fish) with a keen appetite, and ended her meal with a big slice of melon.

Everyone was making plans for the day. There were various excursions, on foot and by car, and some quite difficult ascents for the climbing enthusiasts. One or two took picnic lunches and went off exploring on their own. The chess-tables were already in session. Cameras appeared on the balcony, and ardent amateur photographers coaxed their friends to stand underneath the palm-trees and pose for them. Addresses were exchanged, scribbled on bits of paper. The post arrived. The host pinned up the day's bulletin of news. Most of the guests began to collect their things and wander down to the beach.

It was getting hotter and hotter. Doctor Kravchenko appeared with her beach-bag. Ludmilla, with a yawn of contentment, flung a towel over her shoulder and followed Doctor Kravchenko down the path through



the pinewood. It was a shingle beach, already dotted with girls basking in the sun. Ludmilla and the Doctor took off their clothes and waded into the cool water. Ludmilla was not allowed to be in the water long for her first swim. But Doctor Kravchenko, twisting and turning like a golden fish, swam most of the morning. They swam naked. The men had a beach of their own where they too swam naked. It was only on the mixed beach that they wore bathing costumes.

Five minutes one side. Five minutes the other side. Five minutes front. Five minutes back. That was all the sun Ludmilla was allowed to take on her first exposure. She rubbed oil into her warm skin, and slipping on her *sarafan*, spread herself blissfully on the beach beneath a paper parasol and thought about nothing at all.

Doctor Kravchenko emerged from the sea, rivulets of water streaming down her body. She told Ludmilla that she had received a letter from her husband. His invention was completed at last and was to be patented. He and Petka had been working all hours on it. Madame Borodina was ill again.

They idled away the morning, relaxing as only busy people on holiday can relax. The sun blazed down until it hurt the eyes to look at the dancing points of light on the sea. Doctor Kravchenko produced a bottle of Narzan water and two glasses. Ludmilla took out a tiny jacket she was embroidering and didn't get on with it. As noon approached it grew too hot to be comfortable out of the water. Slowly they gathered themselves together and made for the shade of the pinewoods and back to their hostels, stopping on the way at the village café for a drink.

A lad from the *Chasta Aga* was sitting at one of the tables. Ludmilla had already met him at the morning gymnasium class. His name was Valodya and he came from a Leningrad film-producing factory. He had strained his heart in an accident at the factory and was recuperating.

Valodya was extremely tall and lanky, with awkward hands and feet. He looked about sixteen. He had light blue eyes, a turned-up nose and a wide grin. A shock of flaxen hair swept over his boyish head. And he never looked tidy. His tie was always awry or his shoe-lace undone. He was usually to be found sprawling on the balcony, deep in abstruse technical books.

They joined him. Ludmilla introduced Doctor Kravchenko. The three of them, over iced drinks, chatted away the time before lunch. Valodya was immediately attracted to Doctor Kravchenko. He sought naïvely to engage her attention by detailing his accident. But the Doctor's air of polite professional interest soon made him change his approach. When they rose to go Valodya offered each an arm, and when they arrived at the gateway of the *Chasta Aga* he asked eagerly if he might accompany the Doctor as far as her gateway. She smiled a rather quizzical assent.

As Valodya was late getting back to lunch he incurred the spoon-rapping ceremony, during which he shot a pathetic glance at Ludmilla. He badly wanted to sit next to her, but there was no vacant place anywhere near. Obviously Valodya had something on his mind.

After the afternoon siesta he joined Ludmilla at her table on the balcony. For a time he chatted about nothing in particular with a desperate air of insincerity, then earnestly asked Ludmilla if she and the Doctor would go to a concert with him the following evening. It was a Red Army concert at Yalta, a few miles away. Ludmilla said it sounded a delightful plan and she would ask the Doctor. Valodya heaved a deep sigh and took her empty glass to refill from the tea-kettle. Ludmilla was puzzled. She couldn't quite make out what was the matter with the lad.

Doctor Kravchenko had no objection. Provided she was allowed to swim every possible moment during the day she was agreeable to spending the rest of the time as they liked.

The *Chasta Aga* had only three rules. First was the compulsory afternoon rest. Second that no alcohol was to be brought into the house (those who

wished could always go to the village inn for a drink). The third rule was that eleven o'clock was bedtime. Those who intended to be out later were expected to tell the host beforehand. To go to Yalta for the Red Army concert meant that they could not be back before midnight. Ludmilla told the host.

Valodya, who joined them confidently during their evening walk, seemed to have recovered his spirits, and was again his charming impudent self. He told them funny stories about his factory, mimicked the Leningrad film stars and dashed into the village restaurant to procure them a local dainty. "*Chibureki*. Try it. It has the most extraordinary taste. Like brown paper sauté, don't you think?" They all three nibbled at the *chibureki*.

"It's a staple food in most hot countries," protested Doctor Kravchenko, laughing. "In India they call it Chapatti, then there's a variety they eat in North China and another kind popular with the peasants of Mexico."

"But it still tastes like brown paper," said Ludmilla.

After tea next day the three of them set off by car for Yalta, so that they could spend some time there before the concert started. Valodya had taken pains with his appearance. He was dressed in immaculate white linen and wearing his best roubashka, handsomely embroidered at throat, wrists, and hem in red and black. Upon his tow hair perched an embroidered cap with a long tassel. His shoe-lace, however, was undone as usual. Ludmilla and the Doctor exchanged a mischievous glance. Doctor Kravchenko wore a light silk dress, and over her shoulders her short white jacket was slung student-fashion, the sleeves dangling loose. Ludmilla wore her beautiful cashmere shawl. The bus was filled with holiday-makers from different villages along the coast.

Yalta is a seaside resort popular since Tsarist days and with a lingering flavour of 1914, which Valodya, who was sensitive to atmosphere, noticed immediately. Though all he knew of those days was from books and old pictures, he felt the period instinctively. There was, for instance, a fat lady of forty tottering down the pier on high heels. She wore a short dress with a very low waistline and the oddest of romantic hats. She held a leash at the end of which pattered the smallest of pekinese adorned by the largest of ridiculous silk bows, and she looked exactly like a picture-postcard in an out-of-date album.

Valodya and his guests ate ice-creams on the pier and chattered a lot of agreeable nonsense as people do on holiday. Doctor Kravchenko, who was usually rather reserved, talked about her husband and Leonid. Valodya changed the subject abruptly.

The Red Army concert was very stirring. After their languid days

relaxing on the beach, the powerful choral singing, the trumpet solos and dashing marches came like a torrent of invigorating cold water, jolting them out of their agreeable lethargy.

Valodya was tremendously moved, and like most Russians he was not ashamed of emotion. Under the honey-coloured moon on the way home he began declaiming verses of Lermontov. The two women listened with grave attention, as they jolted homewards through the brilliant tropical night. Ludmilla, who was tired, bade them good-night and slipped into bed. Valodya escorted the Doctor to her doorway.

"Good-night, Valodya," said Doctor Kravchenko, with a charming smile. "It has been lovely. Thank you for taking us."

He seized her hand awkwardly and bending down to peer into her face



said in a gruff voice : "I know this will seem ridiculous to you, Comrade Doctor—and you will probably laugh at me. But I must tell you—I am desperately in love with you. From the moment I set eyes on you, yesterday, I felt you were the only woman I could ever love . . . and now you produce a husband and child. How wretched I am!" He smote his forehead despairingly and went on gloomily : "Why is it always like this with me? All the women I fall in love with are married already, and one, Nina Yefimovna, even had five children. But I have never felt like this before, I swear to you. I suppose there's no hope for me. Well, don't laugh at me at least—for I can tell you it's jolly painful . . . and please don't tell me it's just a passing holiday infatuation—they all tell me that. I'll never speak of this again, but I had to tell you. Good-night." He stooped and kissed her hand tragically, turned abruptly and was gone.

So Valodya became a friend and the duet was turned into an agreeable



trio, for he was good fun and determined to make them happy all the time, chiefly because he loved to see Doctor Kravchenko's serious face break into its delightful girl's smile.

The holiday slipped away day by day, restfully, gently. Ludmilla grew almost as brown as her room-mates, so that her fair hair looked bleached against her sunburned skin and the whites of her eyes showed up startlingly. She gradually swam more and spent longer and longer in the sun. She had never in her life felt quite so marvellously well. And Doctor Kravchenko bloomed like a tropical flower in the sunshine.

One day when their month was drawing to an end, Ludmilla received a letter from her mother in which she wrote that Madame Borodina had just had another heart attack and, though slowly recovering, was still in bed. Mamma Pavlova wrote that Petka wouldn't leave her bedside at all, but insisted on sleeping in a camp-bed within reach, in case she needed anything. But that the old lady, though obliged to lie flat in bed, insisted on continuing the embroidery of the roubashka she was preparing for Ludmilla's baby. Ludmilla, troubled, showed the letter to Doctor Kravchenko.

"She might die quite suddenly," said the Doctor gently. "We must be prepared for that, my darling. These heart cases . . ."

Valodya dashed in to say that he had arranged a farewell party for them, a moonlight musical party in the pinewoods, and would they be sure to be ready at nine o'clock the following evening.

During the afternoon siesta Sergei, the Caucasian girl's Russian husband, dropped in. He sat on the edge of her bed and read poetry to her. It was just such a habit as she and Sasha took pleasure in, and Ludmilla felt a pang at the distance separating her from her own husband. As though to reassure her, the baby moved suddenly within her.

"Here is my allegiance," she thought, "swimming in its little pond. But hurry, hurry time and bring back my husband to me. Letters are a poor substitute for flesh and blood."

It was the evening before their return to Moscow. They were all packed and ready for the motor-coach for Sevastopol which left the *Chasta Aga* after breakfast. Valodya had been dashing about mysteriously all day organizing his party and holding small rehearsals in quiet corners of the garden. Now he strolled about, hands in pockets, like a general before battle, waiting for the appointed moment to arrive.

At nine o'clock Ludmilla, who was tying a festive blue ribbon in her hair, heard the tread of marching feet, and then outside her *châlet* door a band broke into a popular march. She flew to the window and saw an orchestra of about thirty people, ranged in a semi-circle round the door.

They were playing the most varied assortment of instruments, with Valodya conducting vigorously.

He had assembled every instrument he could muster, irrespective of the laws of formal orchestration, and the resulting symphony was exciting and extraordinary. There were six guitars, a mandolin, a balaleika, two accordions, a violin, Sergei had a *zurn* (he had borrowed this ancient instrument from the local museum), several *bandore*-players who came from the Ukraine, and there was even a *gusli*, a sort of psaltery, played by a tough young man from Minsk. And her two Caucasian room-mates were playing their native instrument, the *chongur*. The rest of the orchestra had mouth-organs, tin flutes, drums, cymbals, and even rattles.

Ludmilla finished tying her ribbon and ran out to greet them. Valodya gave her his arm and off they marched leading the procession, to collect Doctor Kravchenko. Never had anyone heard such an assembly of sounds. It suggested an impromptu concert by the instruments themselves in the concert-hall after the performers had gone to bed. Amongst the twangings and wheezings of the guitars and accordions, the drumming and clashing and scraping, the clear high whistle of the *zurn* asserted itself shrilly. Yet the tune they were all aiming at was unmistakable. It was Dunayevsky's rousing march, "Joyeux Garçons," and as they marched they sang the words :

"We'll spice our work with songs and jest,  
The hardest work brings forth our best.  
For we were born in a brave new age  
And never will give up our heritage.

And if our foes dare raise their hand  
Against the living happiness of our land,  
Then we will sing a song of war  
Shoulder to shoulder as our fathers stood before. . . ."

Doctor Kravchenko was encircled by the procession and carried off with them to the pinewoods. Valodya (who had by now taken a guitar himself) was still conducting vigorously, with impressive comic jerks of his fair hair in the best romantic conductor tradition.

"I'm glad I packed this morning," whispered Ludmilla. "We shall be up late to-night. . . ."

It was a warm still night lit by an immense moon. The odour of the pines was vivid, and they could hear the splash of the sea against the shingle. Valodya, who was a born stage-manager, had thought of everything. They gathered in a clearing just beyond the beach. Valodya brought his march to a triumphant conclusion and the orchestra collapsed laughing on to the carpet of fresh pine-needles. During the intermission before they got back their breath, Valodya, with a grandiloquent wave of the hand, produced

bottles of white Crimean wine, tumblers and bonbons. Then followed toasts pledged with clinking glasses and then more music. It was a romantic scene in its pinewood setting, the amber moonlight filtering through dark branches and the mingled scents of sea and pine lingering on the still air.

One after another each contributed a song or a poem or a dance. Valodya, who seemed to be at his gayest, brought tears of mirth to their eyes with a long ridiculous *chastouchki* which he sang in the old-fashioned wailing peasant manner with hardly any tune at all, stretching out the words like a drawn tape-measure.

They all clapped his song, especially Doctor Kravchenko, who was enjoying the party immensely. Thoughts chased through her mind as she sat curled up on a fallen tree-trunk. She thought of her own unhappy childhood, contrasted with her Leonid's carefree life. She thought of her husband with a warm sense of friendship. She hoped this absurd Valodya would one day mate as happily. He was at a dangerous age. Another married woman might not treat him as sensibly as she, for he was ridiculously touching with his ill-directed emotions. She liked the way he continued to study his difficult technical manuals. Valodya threw himself whole-heartedly into everything he did. He was a hundred-per-center. It was impossible not to like him. He was so completely without guile. She felt she would like to pick out a nice girl for him of his own age. And then she smiled to herself to think how indignantly he would repudiate such an idea.

So she smiled her friendliest smile upon this tall gawky youth, who was gallantly throwing himself with all his might into the entertainment.

When it came to Ludmilla's turn she sang on the spur of the moment a sweet little lullaby she remembered hearing her mother sing once.

Unaccompanied, her shawl loosely gathered round her shoulders, her blue ribbon gleaming in the moonlight, Ludmilla's clear young voice rose among the pine-trees.

" . . . sleep my little one,  
The stars will guard your cot,  
Softly the wind scarcely stirs  
The slender golden stem.  
Sleep my baby free from care  
Till the sun high overhead  
Sends a golden loaf through the air,  
Onto your window pane. . . ."

Now it was Doctor Kravchenko's turn. She was careful to refrain from dancing the dance she had danced at Ludmilla's wedding party out of pity for poor Valodya. She knew how seductive were those exquisite movements. Instead she did a different dance . . . quite as beautiful.



It was a mimed Uzbek dance interpreting the different stages in the raising of the cotton plant.

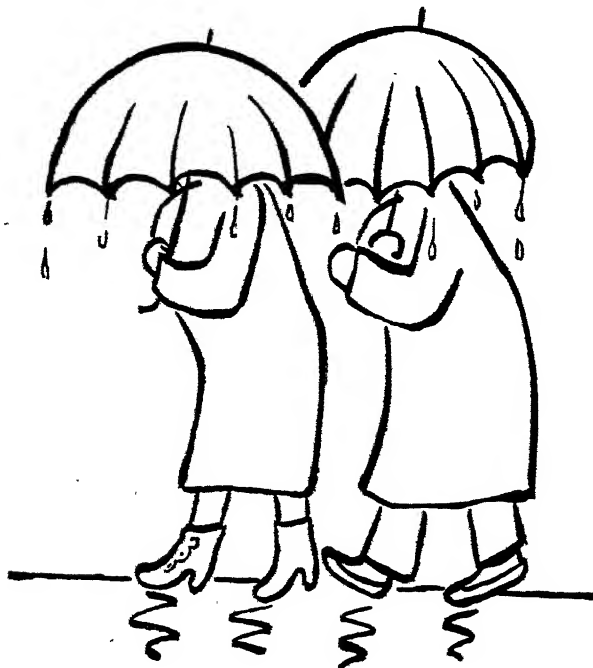
Valodya, following every movement with eager eyes, took up his guitar and began to accompany her, and as the dance quickened, jumped to his feet still playing and danced round her. At the conclusion of the dance he swept his fingers across the strings in a resounding chord.

"Comrades," he cried. . . . "A toast for our two guests of honour ! Raise your glasses, Comrades, to the coming generation and to our National Minorities !"

## IX

### *Autumn*

It was autumn. The summer seemed a hundred years away. Winter loomed ahead. Rain poured down for days on end, steadily, remorselessly, sweeping the yellow leaves off the thinning trees and driving them in drenched mounds into the swollen gutters. The sky was opaque grey and



looked close enough to touch. People shuffled by in ugly mackintoshes with steaming wet umbrellas. There was a dank smell indoors as well as out, and no escape from the dripping dripping rain. It was the kind of weather that made housewives fractious over their kerosene stoves, children fretful and lovers quarrelsome.

There was tension in the group of flats on the landing. Madame Borodina was now gravely ill. Boris was in China. They could not hope to get him back in time. Petka only left her bedside to go to work, returning to his post beside her as soon as he got back. His usual boisterousness had deserted

him, and only in her presence did he try to appear his impudent self, for he wanted above all to spare her anxiety and make her last days happy. The Professor seemed to tread on leaden feet and his lectures, though he delivered them as punctiliously as ever, had lost their sparkle.

The tension naturally spread to the other two flats. Kravchenko, having completed his invention, was in a deflated mood and spent most evenings gloomily playing chess at the Scientists' Club. Doctor Kravchenko spent all her spare time tending Madame Borodina, replacing the trained nurse whenever she could. At the Pavlova's Ludmilla, awaiting the birth of her child, wept on her mother's shoulder because she could do nothing to prevent the impending tragedy that hung over her dear friends.

The Professor's wife was old and had fulfilled her long life in her own sweet and not unimportant pattern. It had been a life totally devoted to others. A life of sympathy and understanding more than personal achievement. She had been essentially the wife of a famous man and mother of a brilliant son. Yet she had become so much part of all their busy lives that they could none of them imagine how things could go on without her.

And as the constant downpour of rain ceased, to let in a brief and exquisite St. Martin's summer, Madame Borodina rallied for an hour or two, then died as gently and quietly as she had lived.

Although they were expecting it, nevertheless her death came as a heavy blow to them all. Each in his own way had admired and been devoted to the old lady. And Boris had not been there at the end. She had asked for him, timidly, as though she felt she had no right to. And he had not been there. Bowed beneath his sorrow, the Professor could not bear to break his sad news in a cable. So he sat down at his littered desk and, not without tears, wrote his son a long, long letter.

But the Professor was too disciplined a scholar to neglect his work. The staff at the Museum, distressed at his grief, begged him to go away on holiday for a while, assuring him they could manage everything for him in his absence. On the contrary, he said, the only way to meet his trouble was to throw himself into his work more energetically than before. In service to others he hoped to conquer his own feelings, and he decided to start immediately the book he had always been planning to write when he had more time. It would mean long hours of research after his day's duties at the Museum. This was what he desired.

He was, however, deeply concerned for Petka. The lad had not the Professor's balance and self-abnegation, and Madame Borodina's death had completely upset him.

The day of her funeral was a golden autumn day, with a fresh blue sky and generous sun. The sad procession followed the simple white coffin

to its last resting-place. Mamma Pavlova walked beside the Professor and Polina, grieved for poor Petka, insisted on going along with him. Petka tried to pull himself together, but he walked as though stupefied. He was thinking how she would have loved such a day. Not the intense heat of summer nor the icy blasts of winter but a gentle warm kind of day, so like her own character.

He wished he had been better behaved, he wished he had never sworn nor blasphemed, he wished he had been more helpful to her, he wished desperately that he could have had another chance to show her how dearly he loved her and how he appreciated all she had done for him. Then he noticed how the Professor was walking . . . slowly, without his buoyant spring, leaning heavily on Mamma Pavlova's arm, and how his kindly old face was set in deep lines of sorrow. Tears welled up in Petka's eyes. Anyhow, he could still look after the Professor. That would be something for him to do, something for *her*, something to help fill the awful emptiness that was destroying his peace of mind.

It was a dejected group which wound its way homewards. Petka could not bear to look at her empty arm-chair, and dragged it into another room. Then the empty space where it had stood overcame him. He burst into tears and rushed away to sob his heart out alone.

"Professor Borodin, dear friend," suggested Mamma Pavlova, tears in her own eyes, "what can we do to help you? Shall we take Petka to live with us? He and Polina are such good friends. Maybe it would ease his heart. Or perhaps, as Doctor Kravchenko has suggested, he might be happier at the Kravchenko's, as he and Oleg Semyonovitch work together. It is only in work that one can learn to overcome a personal loss as well I know. What should we do now?"

The Professor patted her shoulder gratefully.

"For my part," he said, "I am old, and the remembrance of the many years of happiness Elizavetta Petrovna and I have enjoyed together eases my pain. Then I am better disciplined than our poor Petka and can lose myself in my research work. Let us ask the lad if he would like to go and live with you or with the Kravchenko's. It will indeed be too lonely in this empty flat for my high-spirited Petka."

That evening the Professor quietly suggested the proposed plan to Petka. For a moment Petka's eyes glared at him, incredulous, hostile, then he flung himself into the Professor's arms.

"Do you want to get rid of your troublesome Petka, Alexander Mikhailovitch? If you don't want me any more only say the word and I will disappear. But how could I live with anyone else? Let me stay here. I will look after you as well as I can. I will try to take her place in your life. Don't you understand that this is my home, my only home? Let

me be your second son still. Don't send me away. I like the Pavlovs and the Kravchenkos, but this is different. Here is my home. Don't send me away from you. Let me look after you."

The Professor stroked the lad's head. He was touched and words did not come easily.

"Why, my boy, I didn't want to lose you. I regard you as my son equally with Boris. I only want you to be happy, and it will be lonely now here without Mother, though our neighbours will not let us feel lonely as far as they can prevent it, I know. I only thought there would be more young company and gaiety for you at Mamma Pavlova's or more interest for your work at the Kravchenko's. Of course, I prefer you to stay here with me. I should be horribly lonely without you, son. Well, it is settled. You stay here with this lonely old man. I'll not bring it up again. I understand."

But the Professor decided that the strain of the funeral needed lifting from the young people and proposed to Mamma Pavlova that he take Polina and Petka for an excursion to the country to see his old friend the artist, Favorsky. Mamma Pavlova agreed eagerly, thinking it might take the Professor out of himself at the same time. Favorsky had been Petka's art teacher, and the lad greeted the proposed visit with his first show of enthusiasm since the death of Madame Borodina.

They rose early on the morning of their visit. It was a tempestuous wet day. The rain swirled in gusts over the roads. Every rainpipe poured a cascade of water into the overflowing gutters. People staggered by, bent beneath soaking umbrellas. When they boarded the train their carriage was crammed with steaming humanity, uncomfortable, inclined to be cross and fidgety. The rain pelted remorselessly against the windows.

The Professor, who had given over this day completely to the young people, had not even brought anything to read. He put his hand into his deep pocket and with a paternal smile produced a round box of crystallized fruits. He felt for a moment a young man again . . . as he had felt when Boris was a little boy and they had taken him to the Moscow zoo for the first time. He remembered how delightful his wife had looked that day, in the exaggerated shoulders and saucy hat of the period, picking up her trailing skirts with a neat gloved hand as they crossed the dusty road, whilst he held tightly the small hot paw of a round-eyed Boris immaculately dressed in a sailor suit. The Professor swept his hand across his eyes to break the vision, and pulled himself together sharply. It was always like this the moment he stopped working.

At the station Favorsky met them with outstretched arms. He was delighted to see them again, and determined to allow the Professor no moment all that day for memory to intrude a shadow. He piled them



all into his pony-trap and away they splashed through the pools of rain that festooned the country road. The trees were almost naked, bending before the onslaughts of the gale. The sky was dark with clouds, and the withered grass sodden and flattened. A few rooks hopped miserably above their soaked nests, cawing feeble protest against the weather. The party turned up their coat collars and crouched beneath the huge umbrella the Professor unfurled.

Favorsky was big and bearded. He looked more like a farmer than an



artist, yet his enormous hands produced the most delicate wood-engravings. His skill was versatile. His lovely stage-sets and costumes for *Twelfth Night* had been the success of the Moscow Theatre Festival of 1934, and still continued to enchant the audiences at the Kamerny Theatre. He was Principal of the Moscow Polytechnic, and Director of the famous Toy Museum of Zagorsk, in which village he had made his home, for he preferred living in the country.

The pony stopped at a simple log cottage with deep roofs and the fanciful fretwork window-frames typical of Russian villages. This was his home. His wife and youngest daughter Masha, a child with long fair hair

and a complexion like summer, were waiting at the door to greet their guests. They entered, stripping off their streaming overcoats and leaving the wet umbrella to drip in the woodshed.

Favorsky's wife ushered them into the studio and left them with the youngest daughter whilst she went to see about lunch.

They were a family of artists. For generations back there had been artists in the Favorsky family. Favorsky's wife was also an artist, and their children, brought up in an atmosphere where art was the family trade, all drew beautifully. The only exception in this family where cousins and aunts and uncles were artists, was Favorsky's brother, who was a priest. A portrait of him hung in the dining-room. He was bearded like Favorsky but looked more austere.

Favorsky and his daughter showed them all their recent work, half-finished stage-sets and maquettes for costume-designs, and sketches for future wood-engravings. Favorsky always had more work on hand than he could manage, yet he never hurried, but did everything slowly and carefully. He was an admirable teacher and Petka had learned much from him, especially how to work with clean honest colours and shapely lines.

There are and always have been artists who paint because something is wrong in their lives, who turn to their palettes to overcome an emotional hurt, as the oyster secretes a pearl to cover up the irritating speck of grit in its shell. Favorsky was not one of these. Painting was not an escape for him, it was life itself. In his pleasant log cottage, pictures were the day's work, as they were to the peasants of Zagorsk, themselves admirable craftsmen.

Favorsky proposed to take his guests over to the Toy Museum before lunch. This was always a treat, and the Favorsky family, who never tired of it, all asked to come too. Professor Borodin had some Museum matters to discuss with Favorsky, and proposed to leave the youngsters to themselves in the afternoon. Polina suggested a visit to the famous Zagorsk Monastery. She had never been inside it, nor had Petka. The visit was easily arranged, for Favorsky's uncle was the curator.

They drank tea in Favorsky's big studio, littered with drawings and painting materials yet too purposeful to look untidy. And then all the family got ready to visit the Zagorsk Toy Museum whilst Favorsky went in search of his keys.

A short walk brought them to the Museum, where the old porter saluted Favorsky with a knowing air. Favorsky never tired of showing people round. He knew each object almost by heart, yet he always returned with a fount of fresh ideas after a walk through its many rooms.

He had had a lot to do with the planning and selection of the material displayed there. He and Professor Borodin kept up a friendly rivalry.

Some of the exhibits were so rare and precious that they could not be touched by anyone at all except Favorsky and his assistant. But as many of the toys as could be were allowed to be handled and examined by the visitors, the vast majority of whom were children. It had not been at all difficult to enforce the clean hands rule in the Zagorsk Museum. The children were so eager to touch and fondle the toys that they scrubbed away at their own hands most willingly before they ventured to approach. And they took a fanatic pride in keeping the Museum objects clean and unbroken. There was, of course, always an attendant in the room to see all was well, and frequently classes came from far distant schools with their teacher.

There were three principal sections of the Zagorsk Museum, first historical toys arranged according to their geographical origin, then a section showing present-day toys and the different processes of their manufacture, and last of all a whole room was devoted to the products of the Zagorsk toy-factory.

The next two hours passed very quickly as they wandered from room to room, delightedly pouncing on one exhibit after another. Toys are common to all classes, all countries, all ages. And here they were, artfully and enticingly displayed. There were primitive dolls chipped out of stone, dolls fashioned ingeniously from reindeer-bone in the Arctic tundras, Dutch dolls, French dolls, Russian clay dolls, straw dolls from Mexico and dolls of rag and beads belonging to the children of Red Indians. There was a whole family of dolls from eighteenth-century Paris, exquisitely moulded in fine wax and dressed in the height of the fashion of Louis XVI. These elegant dolls were equipped with everything a person of fashion needed, cards for *béziq*ue, lorgnettes, masks for the theatre, snuff-boxes . . . and, charming touch, the children dolls had dolls of their own. These doll's dolls, less than an inch high, were exactly dressed like their mistresses who were exactly dressed like the aristocratic French children who had owned them. There were performing dolls—porcelain beauties in glass cases, who rose, bowed, and danced jerkily at the turning of a screw. And last of all came several giant dolls—much larger than any child and far too heavy to be lifted. Dressed in silk and lace specially made by Worth, they had real eyelashes, real hair and real jewellery, and looked not like dolls at all but like models in a Paris coiffeur's shop window. These dolls had belonged to the Tsar's children.

There were cases filled with agreeable toys from Nuremberg. Polina loved the tiny porcelain plates of highly coloured china food, lobsters, peas, sausages and sauerkraut in unbelievable pink green and red glazes.

Petka liked best the room showing how the popular Russian clay toys were made. Each stage in the process fascinated him. First there was a

lump of red clay. Next it had taken rough shape. Then it was hollowed out like a bell. Next arms and head appeared. Then it was baked and painted white, and last of all gay paint had been cunningly applied and the formless lump of common clay had become magically transformed into a fat smiling peasant-woman with a frilled apron or a proud man in striped breeches riding a four-legged creature with yellow horns and purple spots.

Zagorsk was famous for its toy-making and wooden carvings in which birds, animals and flowers were wreathed in fantastic foliage carved with that combination of simplicity and intricacy common to children and peasants. The Zagorsk toys contrasted strongly with the products of the artek, or craftsman's guild of Palekh, famous for its highly lacquered wooden handicrafts, boxes, ikons and trays. The traditional themes of Palekh (unchanged for centuries) fables, fairy tales and religious subjects, were beginning to be influenced by Soviet ideology, with the quaintest results. The mythological figure of Saint George, so popular in Russian folk-lore, now appeared in overalls driving a tractor. Electric lights shot out magical rays previously depicted only as issuing from the mouths of dragons, and the Soviet horticulturist Michurin was immortalized on a lacquer box, showing him burgeoning in a luxuriant bower of such imaginative fruits and vegetables as even he had not thought of. The Zagorsk Museum only showed a few Palekh boxes, for this was the point at which Favorsky's Toy Museum and Professor Borodin's Folk Art Museum joined hands and then separated.

The midday meal at the Favorsky's was a joyous affair. To start with there were so many people round the table. Favorsky at the head, patriarchal, pouring out apéritifs of vodka into tiny glasses. Beside him his smiling wife superintending the dishes, and at the foot Favorsky's mother, an august old lady with a heavy gold chain looped across the purple silk of her bosom, was ladling out the fish-soup from a colossal tureen, and, crowding the long table to its uttermost, his children, cousins, uncles, aunts and friends. There was something almost biblical in their meal-taking. It was good to see the veteran artist gravely breaking bread, toasting his guests and turning from one relation to another as the conversation rippled up and down the table.

It was good conversation. The conversation of people who do jobs and have intimate knowledge of their jobs. There was plenty of fun but no idle gossip. And the Favorsky children (there were only four or five of them present that day, others being on a visit to relations in Leningrad) listened and joined in naturally when they had anything to say. Polina was seated on the left and Professor Borodin on the right next to Favorsky's uncle, an elderly gentleman with an eyeglass who looked like a don and

who was immensely learned about old church manuscripts. He was the curator of the Zagorsk Monastery. As to Petka he was placed next to Masha's great-aunt, a preening old lady, dressed in tucked black silk which rustled with every movement, white lace at wrists and wrinkled chin, and an eyeglass suspended on a black ribbon. She had been a teacher all her life and now in retirement looked like a learned pekinese. She and Petka started a lively cross-talk at once. Polina told the curator about the new boy who was her classmate. He was a negro, an American named Paul,



whose father was a famous singer named Robeson. He wanted to be an engineer.

The meal was simply prepared and served. They ate large quantities of chickens, vegetables and fruits of their own cultivation. There were one or two touches characteristic of the meals served in any artist's house in any country . . . a graceful antique dish not matching anything else, but beautiful in itself; a piquant touch about the sauce, not in any known recipe. Why is it that artists always cook well? There must be some affinity between combining the ingredients of a dish and mixing the colours on the palette. Just as music and mathematics so often go together.

The famous monastery of Zagorsk was dark and forbidding. It had been

built by Ivan the Terrible in expiation of his murder of his own son. For centuries it had stood towering over the village of Zagorsk, holding the peasants in awe. Inside the cupolas, dimly lit from above, was painted the face of a terrible God, an unforgiving harsh deity, fashioned in the fanatic conception of man born in sin, the forehead low, the eyes stony and glaring and the mouth drawn in a grim line. From below, this frightening apparition appeared to the ignorant worshippers as the tangible evidence of the wrath of God, ever present, never sleeping, mesmerizing them into blind obedience or eternal damnation.

There were many famous ikons in this monastery, barbaric riots of gold laden with fantastic ornament and embroidered and re-embroidered with jewels and pearls and heavy gilt.

Lovely in snow, the monastery now loomed impressively through the blinding gusts of rain. The clustered cupolas, deep blue spangled with gilt stars, made it look like a giant's castle out of Grimm.

During the revolution of 1917 the monks had come to Favorsky's uncle, who was an antiquarian, and begged him to take responsibility for the preservation of this historic building. Since then he had continued to hold this office officially, and was now its curator and historian.

The old man and the two young people mounted the steps, looking like pigmies under the towering plaster walls. Inside it was dim, almost dark, and terrifyingly silent. There was a chilling odour about the place, doubly repellent after the cosy warmth and cheerful bustle at the Favorsky household. Polina began to regret her idea. Was this the right place to bring Petka in his present mood?

They paced the stone floor whilst the curator told them the history of the place. It was Polina who presently observed the echo of only four feet. She peered through the dimly-lit church. Petka had disappeared. For a moment she thought he had run away for good. But presently she excused herself and went in search of him.

She found the lad crouched, sobbing, high under the main dome. Hands clenched bitterly he was denouncing the relentless painted face that stared down at him. "Well, are you satisfied now? Haven't you punished me enough? Why did you have to sneak her away too? She did you no harm. You're cruel and wicked. I hate you. But you can't frighten me with your big staring eyes. I don't believe in you. Professor Borodin says you were only put there to frighten superstitious peasants. I can read and write and I can design airplanes that fly above your head, so you can't frighten me. You can't, you can't, you can't. I'll show you what I think of you. You're nothing but a painted idol!"

Polina ran to him and put her arms round his shoulders.

"Come away, Petka," she begged, shuddering. "Don't look at that

gloomy face up there . . . it gives me the creeps. Come, dear Petka Let's go back. The Professor will be waiting for us."

Petka, as though aroused from a trance, suffered himself to be led down the spiral stone steps, across the dim church and out into the fresh air. He was trembling as though roused from a nightmare. Polina squeezed his arm sympathetically, and began to talk about parachute-jumping. She must get his mind on to sane everyday matters.

"Petka, you've got your parachute-jumper's badge, haven't you? I'm going to try for mine before the season is over. Tell me how do you get out of the spin? One of our girls has worked out a method of her own. She starts to fall with her legs straight and hands at her side. When she goes into a spin she coils herself into a ball and turns a quick somersault. Then she throws out both arms and legs sharply and the spin stops. She tried it from a glider. Do you think that's a good way? How do you do it?"

Petka with an effort pulled himself together to answer her normally, and by the time they arrived back at Favorsky's home the colour had returned to his cheeks and he seemed himself again. Polina hoped that the Professor wouldn't notice something had gone wrong.

It was time to go home now. The rain was still dripping ceaselessly. Favorsky and his daughter held a whispered consultation about something and then the daughter came forward with a present for Polina.

It was a small carving of a woman holding a baby. She was roughly hewn out of a single piece of wood, painted and varnished. She wore a yellow dress with a bustle and round her shoulders a dark shawl.

"It's a local product," said Favorsky, smiling. "Made by a very aged local peasant entirely on his own initiative. It is like no other local carving I have seen. Perhaps it is the beginning of a new type of toy. You see the woman's costume. No Russian peasant ever wore such clothes. He must have remembered some fine lady who lived here in his childhood."

All the Favorsky family came to the door to see them off, smiling and waving greetings until they were out of sight.

"Mamma," said Polina that evening as the Pavlovs were taking tea round the table, "I don't think Petka ought to be left alone much just now. He's still awfully upset. If he won't leave the Professor and come and live here with us, or stay with the Kravchenko's, couldn't someone go and stay at their flat with them? They need someone to look after them. Not just food and mending. We can see to that, can't we? But someone about so they don't keep remembering poor Madame Borodina every time they come into an empty flat."

"I'm sure you're right, darling child," replied Mamma Pavlova with a sigh. "But what can we do? Who can we suggest?"

"Mamma!" cried Ludmilla suddenly, her face lighting up, "I have an idea. What about Jane? She loves the Borodins and she and Petka get on fine. I think if I talked to her she would be glad to come. And she's a busy person, kind and cheerful. Everyone loves her, and a woman about that flat would make them both much happier I feel sure. I'll ask her anyway. I'll see her to-morrow if she has a moment to spare."

A few mornings later the newspaper had a surprise for them. In the



published lists of prize-winners in the State Lottery Polina's name appeared. She had won a minor prize of 2000 roubles.

"You can guess the child's excitement," wrote Ludmilla that evening, in her weekly letter to Sasha. "She is going to invest 1000 roubles in the State loan and buy us all trinkets and Mamma a lovely new teapot and herself a new ski-suit with the rest. But the first thing she did was to rush to the Artists Stores on Kuznetsky Most and buy the handsomest paintbox she could find for Petka."

Ludmilla rang Jane and was invited to dine at the *Moscow Daily News* canteen, Jane being deep in a story as usual. Over the meal Ludmilla told her how unhappy Petka was. Jane had not seen him since the funeral.



ONE AMERICAN THOUGHTFULLY while Ludmilla unfolded her plan, then nodded her head.

"O.K. by me, Ludmilla. I'd be glad to move over there if it would help any. I'd do anything to help Boris out. The Professor is an old darling, and Petka and I get on fine. I'm not all that domesticated, but a skirt about the place might just snap them out of their doldrums. I'll have a talk with the Professor, shall I? I'll pretend I need a room and will they take me in. Don't you think that's the line?"

And Jane duly rang up the Professor and begged to be allowed to rent a room, as she had to move out of her present one. The Professor did not see through the simple plot. He was delighted, and Petka also was all in favour and helped Jane move in the very next free-day.

"No luggage to speak of," said Jane. "Only a waggon-load of books, you see."

"Books," grinned Petka, "that's our speciality here. Another few thousand wouldn't be noticed in this Biblioteka. There, let me carry your typewriter. I'll be as careful as a nursing mother. What a comic little machinka. It weighs no more than a ladies' hair curler! Now I'll go and get you some tea. Make yourself at home."

And so Jane was installed, to everyone's content.

"Professor," she remarked that evening, solemnly threading a darning needle with the wrong-coloured wool, "I guess this is the right place for me to migrate. What with your book and Petka's blue-prints, see if I can't bestir myself and get on with my great American novel. The first two,ooo words are the worst, don't you think? . . . Why, there's someone at the door. I'll go and open it."

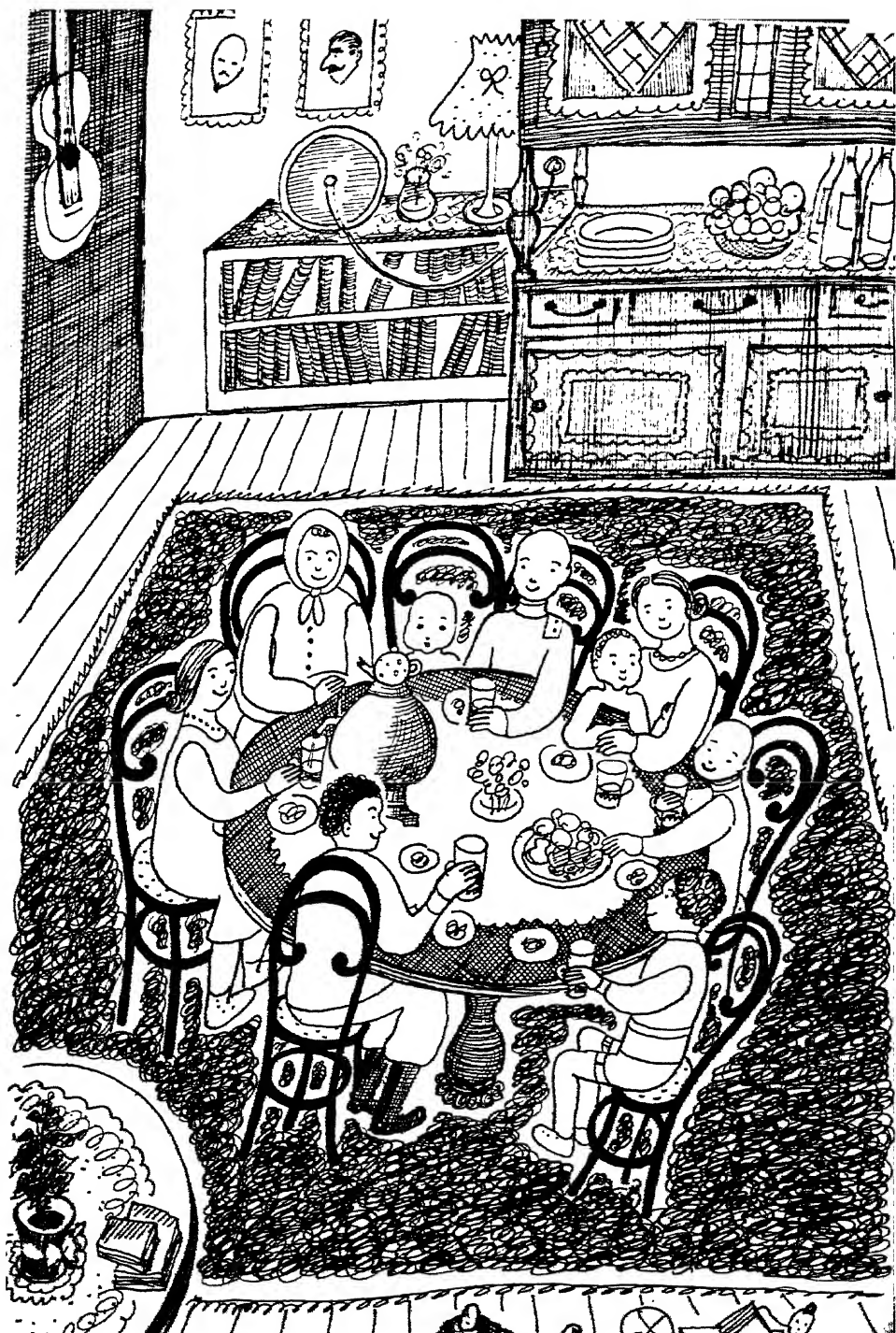
It was Mamma Pavlova, breathless and gathering her shawl excitedly about her shoulders.

"Dear Jane, dear Professor . . . Ludmilla . . . her time has come. The Doctor and I are just going to take her round to the maternity hospital. Kolya hasn't back yet. Will you see that Leonid is all right? He sleeps all night, but if he should wake up give him a drink of water and turn him over in his cot. Oh dear, I'm all of a tremble. Excuse me. I must run."

They all rushed downstairs to see Ludmilla off on her great adventure. The taxi was ticking away, and Ludmilla was being helped in. Mamma Pavlova headed in the smart suit-case with Ludmilla's things and her own basket with the baby-clothes. Then she and the Doctor got in and the door closed after them.

They all waved her off. Ludmilla waved back, quite speechless.

"That's American for Red-hot," explained the Professor as they went back up the stairs.



## X

### *Birth*

LUDMILLA sat in the taxi holding her mother's hand tightly. The pain were only just starting. Ludmilla couldn't remember ever having been in pain in her life with anything except once a broken leg ski-ing. They weren't bad pains yet. And they wouldn't be allowed to become bad. Doctor Kravchenko assured her. As soon as they began to hurt much they would give her something to help.

"How different it was when I had my babies," said Mamma Pavlova. "They never gave us anything then. And there wasn't a doctor or anything like that for us poor people. An old woman used to come in who called herself a midwife, but she was so dirty and unpleasant that I was thankful my little ones were born with no one to help but a kind neighbour."

"Needless suffering is wicked," said Doctor Kravchenko warmly. "There's enough pain in the world as it is that *can't* be avoided. What's the use of modern science if it can't give us painless childbirth?"

Mamma Pavlova nodded agreement.

"I'd like to see all the best scientific minds in the world working together to making life easier and pleasanter, especially homes and babies," went on the Doctor. "It's shocking to think that two thousand years after the birth of Christ living conditions and methods of childbirth are still, for so many millions of people, in the same primitive conditions as they were then. At least we in the Soviet Union are making a start. Wait and see. We shall do much more in the future. There are so many women now who have a hand in the formulation of our laws and our national planning. But there . . . you've started me on my favourite subject. This isn't exactly the time for a lecture. How do you feel now, my darling Ludmilla? We'll be at the hospital in no time. Aren't you excited?"

"I feel this is going to be the most important occasion of my life up to now," Ludmilla said, searching for words. "I do so want to do it well."

"Of course you do. And so you shall. We'll tell you exactly what to do, and you'll have a lovely baby before you know where you are," replied the Doctor cheerfully. "You should just see our nursery of newly-borns, wriggling and chirping like a big nest of baby thrushes. Sometimes when I realize the world is rushing into another hideous war and when I feel

tired of the crass idiocy of humans, I take a walk through this ward. Dear girl, it lifts up my spirits like Beethoven's *Eroica*. Here we are. Let me help you out. Now trust us. Everything is going to be fine."

Kind efficient hands awaited Ludmilla. She was taken to the maternity section of the hospital, undressed, and popped into a huge hot bath.

"There little one," she remarked through the steam to her unborn baby. "It won't be long now, will it, dear? I'm longing to meet you. I do hope you'll like me. You really don't hurt much at all yet. I thought it would be much worse than this."

Doctor Kravchenko saw that she was comfortable afterwards. "Lie down if you like, or walk about. This is the labour ward. All these mothers-to-be look cheerful enough, don't they? Mostly they're here with their third or fourth. Just let me have a look at you? Pains getting worse? I'll give you an injection now. That will help. Then you'll get another later. I'll come round and see you again before long. Want something to read? I read Shakespeare's *Sonnets* when I was in labour, I remember. They go together somehow."

Ludmilla lay down for a while, not very comfortably. "I feel like a sheep on her back," she thought. "Won't it be queer to have a waistline again. Oh dear Sasha, are you thinking of us now? I am thinking of you. How you plunge, little child. Are you so impatient to be born?" Then she struggled up and paced the room for a while, in peignoir and felt slippers. The pains were becoming more frequent and lasted longer. The pains in the pit of her stomach slowly ceased, and a different dynamo of pains began to set themselves in motion. The intricate machinery of childbirth was in action.

"Now I'm getting on," she said.

Doctor Kravchenko came in later to give her a second injection and in the morning a third. "Now you're almost ready. Come with me. Are you sure you want a girl? We'll know soon. Are you excited? I am. Just try to do exactly what we tell you, dear child. We'll see all goes as it should."

She led Ludmilla from the labour ward into the delivery ward, and put a screen round the bed, whilst she went to tie a business-like rubber apron over her white overalls, and scrub her hands. A young nurse wheeled along a white tray laden with basins, bottles and rows of efficient-looking steel instruments. There was a stringent smell of antiseptic in the ward. Ludmilla sat up, too excited to speak. The great moment was approaching.

The pains were almost continuous now, but dimmed by the injections, quite bearable. The young nurse smiled sympathetically at her. "Your first?" she asked. "My ninth . . . for to-day I mean. I go off duty



at midday. I had fifteen yesterday. . . . Pooh, that's nothing, we had thirty-two here one day last week."

There was a muffled cry from behind the next screen. Then a sudden wail. Doctor Kravchenko hurried from behind the screen, carrying a wet gasping little creature, only a second or two old. A nurse quickly bore him away, but not before Ludmilla had seen him.

"Oh," she cried, "Is that what they look like? But he isn't a bit ugly. I thought they were all quite hideous when they were born. Will mine look like that?"

"Hideous?" retorted the young nurse. "We think they're the most beautiful creatures in the world, and so will you too . . . just you wait. . . . Now you're nearly ready. Here comes the Doctor."

The white table was wheeled close beside the bed.

"Now, it's to be a girl, is it?" said Doctor Kravchenko, bending over Ludmilla, and gently touching her damp forehead. "Don't be surprised if it's a boy. We are having a run of boys to-day. Here goes." She knotted a towel round the bed-rail. "Now, darling, when the next big pain comes hang on to this and push hard. One, two, three, *now* . . . there! that wasn't bad. . . ."

"I'll do the next push better," murmured Ludmilla, a concentrated

look on her face, as though she were learning a new weaving process at work. "One . . . two . . . three . . . there! Was that all right?"

"That was fine," encouraged the Doctor. "Now again, take a deep breath . . . and again. . . . Don't strain, darling, baby wants to take his own time. There, now again. One, two, three. That's right. . . ."

The pains intensified in an increasing spiral, but the injections were still subduing the pain, and Ludmilla was so intent on doing her new job well that she only felt the pain as an undercurrent.

"There, now take it more gently. . . . Gasp . . . that's right. We don't want him to come too fast. Dear child, I can see his little head already. . . . O, lots of hair . . . there, now again. One, two, three . . . push . . . and again . . . and again . . . here he comes . . . steady. . . ."

Ludmilla felt a sudden miraculous loosening as though her own body were departing from her, then in a cascade of water a slippery, squirming thing burst from her into the Doctor's efficient hands.

"A girl!" cried the Doctor. "Well done, Ludmilla!"

"Oh, show me, show me," murmured Ludmilla, tears trickling from her eyelids. "Don't carry her off. Let me see her just as she is born."

Doctor Kravchenko held up the latest Soviet citizen. She was tawny-coloured, firm, and solid-looking, with inscrutable Asiatic features and wet dark hair.

Ludmilla regarded her daughter with awe.

"Oh, she's dark. Did I really have that great creature inside me? I can't think however she managed to get out." She heaved a great sigh of content. "Oh, don't mix her up with the other nine, will you, please?"

"She'll be quite different in a few days' time. Most babies have dark hair when they're born, if they have any hair at all," smiled the nurse. "As to mixing her up, what do you take us for? This isn't a lottery. She will be numbered, with the same number as your bed. So you see there can be no mistake.

The nurse having washed Ludmilla's daughter, rubbed delicate oils and unguents into the tender skin and then skilfully swaddled her in yard upon yard of the finest linen. Meanwhile another nurse busied herself with Ludmilla. "Here, drink this." Ludmilla drank a glass of comforting hot tea. She felt marvellously well and exhilarated. It was two o'clock in the afternoon. Presently she was carefully rolled over on to an ambulance and wheeled back to her own ward and her own bed, at the foot of which now stood a crib.

She stretched her arms above her head triumphantly. She had done her job and her baby was what she wanted—a daughter. She let herself

float languidly. Other people would see to what was necessary. She would relax completely.

It was hours later when she woke, and the ward was almost in darkness. One or two discreet shaded lights showed from various bedsides. A sense of happiness flooded Ludmilla like sunshine. She was a mother. She had a daughter . . . Sasha . . . he must be told . . . cable . . . at once. . . .

Doctor Kravchenko appeared beside her bed.

"Don't worry, darling. I've told everybody and we've cabled Sasha. No visitors for a week, you know. But you shall have a glimpse of Mamma Pavlova to-morrow, though she may only stay a few minutes. However, there's a phone by your bedside. You can receive messages, and I'll faithfully bring you all flowers, fruit, telegrams and presents as they come.

"Is baby all right?" asked Ludmilla.

"Absolutely all right and perfectly formed. Is that what you are thinking?" smiled the Doctor. "Yours was the classic normal birth. I had the anæsthetic all ready for a whiff at the end, but you didn't need it. You gave birth beautifully and we are all proud of you. You'll have baby brought round presently for her first nibble. Your milk won't come in for three days yet, but she has to learn how, and you give her something valuable which helps her insides. Nature has thought of everything, you see."

Mamma Pavlova indeed was waiting downstairs as her granddaughter was born, but she knew the rules, and consoled herself for not being allowed to see Ludmilla right away by being allowed to peep at the baby, whom she unhesitatingly pronounced the finest child she had ever set eyes on.

Baby was sleeping soundly in a crib in the nursery and Doctor Kravchenko, having just robed Mamma Pavlova in a large gown of spotless white (all visitors were obliged to wear one), showed her round. There were about forty infants there, mostly only a few days old, some sleeping, some faintly wriggling, and most of them chirping away like so many birds. They looked markedly Asiatic, serene, with narrow Slav eyes. Each baby was numbered—the twins in the end crib had the same number.

"We never make a mistake with this system," explained the Doctor. "If we depended on names it would be hopeless; almost every baby boy is named Alexander, you see, and most of the girls are Lyubas. After all, we've no less than seven million babies born in the U.S.S.R. every year. What are you going to call your grandchild?"

"We haven't decided yet," replied Mamma Pavlova, darting from crib to crib, entranced. "What a splendid batch these are. So big and strong."

"These are our normal babies," said the Doctor. "If you like, I can

spare you five minutes to show you our prematures. We're proud of our record. We very rarely lose one," and she led the way into another ward, equipped with incubators and special electric apparatus for warming and feeding.

A massive nurse, full-bosomed and majestic, brought out of the incubator a minute little mannikin, who, held firmly in the palm of her hand, twisted restlessly, darting tiny suspicious glances out of his bright bird-eyes.

"Who is he?" whispered Mamma Pavlova. "How can she handle him so fearlessly? I should be terrified he might break."



"His name is Valodya," answered the Doctor, restraining a sudden smile, "he's only been in this world ten days, having arrived three months before his time. He's doing nicely. In twenty years' time he'll probably be a young giant like your Sasha, and will be able to hold nurse in the palm of *his* hand, won't you, Vladimir Ilyitch?" and she carefully took the squirming morsel from the nurse's hand, smiled indulgently upon him, and put him back into the incubator.

Telegrams, flowers, fruit came pouring into the hospital for Ludmilla, and soon presents started to arrive for the baby. Her factory-mates sent all sorts of gifts with a round-robin of congratulations from everyone in



her department. The post brought a neatly-knitted blue bonnet, worked in a business-like British shape, with a note in Miss Parker's crisp handwriting :

"MY DEAR LUDMILLA,—Congratulations. I am delighted indeed to hear of the birth of your daughter. Pray accept this small tribute with good wishes from

ETHEL PARKER."

A whole boxful of garments came from the Vassiliev's for their first grandchild. Jane's present wasn't ready yet, and baby was a week old before Jane appeared, and with a look of innocent pride, produced an untidy little bundle containing an execrably knitted garment, marked with printer's ink.

"I thought I'd knit her some pants, Ludmilla. Everybody makes bonnets and dresses. I guess a girl can't have too many pants in this climate. And yellow is a swell colour. O . . . there's a bit of the *M.D.N.* on it . . . must have come off my sleeve. I knitted it in the office as I was correcting the proofs of my article on this year's melon harvest in Uzbekistan."

One leg was shorter than the other and the back and front were indeterminate.

"It's lovely, Jane," said Ludmilla, holding up the unfortunate fruit of Jane's labours, "and what better stain could there be to be sure."

"Glad you like it," said Jane, looking very pleased. "I'm not so handy with my mitts maybe but this certainly was an occasion. We've cabled Boris. He's with the advanced front of the Chinese Fifth Route Army, I guess. Lord knows when he will get the news. I must go now. My time's up. The Professor and the children are waiting to see you. Will they let you eat candy yet? If they do I'll fix you some chocolate fudge. It's the only thing I learned from my college education."

It was Polina and Petka who came next, Polina bursting with solicitude and pride, Petka momentarily abashed by the nurses and having to wear a white overall.

"I knew it would be a girl," cried Polina, taking a parcel from under her arm. "I knew all the time. I've been sewing her a best frock for ages. It's real silk. I bought the stuff with some of my lottery money and I embroidered the five-pointed stars on myself. Mamma thought flowers would look nicer, but I did so want stars. Do you think they're all right?" she asked anxiously, surveying her work with her head on one side.

"They're beautiful, Polina, quite, quite beautiful," said Ludmilla.

"They left the best bit of news for me to tell," announced Petka, throw-

ing out his chest. "Oleg Semyonovitch's invention has been honoured by the Government. It was only announced this morning. So kindly remember that in future I am the assistant of Aviation-Engineer Kravchenko, *Order of the Red Banner*. The invention is to be known as the Kravchenko Anti-freezing Device, and we're going to celebrate on iced champagne. Now I'm wracking my brains for something else to invent. I can't let my boss get one up on me like this, can I? I'm thinking of harnessing the North Star to an aerial dynamo in the stratosphere, attached to a special power-station in Igarka for automatic illumination during the Arctic nights. That's easily worth the Order of Lenin, don't you think?"

The Professor came after these two had left, his kindly face wreathed in smiles and a bunch of flowers in his arms.

"Imagine Doctor Kravchenko putting *me* into a pinafore at my age," he said. "I've seen the baby. She is charming. I am so happy for you, my dear girl. And how blooming you are. It suits you to be a mother. Well, you've heard all the news. Petka was bursting to tell you himself. Our landing is indeed honoured. I must go in a moment," he murmured, fumbling under his white overall for his enormous old-fashioned watch. "I have a meeting at the Museum. Here, Ludmilla, I mustn't forget to give you this," and he carefully extracted a small parcel out of the capacious pocket of his Tolstoy tunic. "She didn't quite manage to finish the embroidery . . . though she was working on it right up to the last . . . she was so eager to have it ready in time," and the Professor dashed a hand across his eyes and hurried away to his meeting.

Ludmilla unwrapped the parcel. It was Madame Borodina's little roubashka, made of fine white linen, exquisitely embroidered round the hem and sleeves, with cross-stitch birds, trees and flowers. It was not quite finished—Madame Borodina's needle was still fastened to the hem, with a length of crimson silk threaded through it.

"Well," cried Doctor Kravchenko, "you've heard our news? You see before you a woman swelling with pride. Not every woman has an Order of the Red Banner in the family. I am delighted. As for poor Oleg Semyonovitch he is so shy and embarrassed by all the congratulations that he hides in the Scientist's Club every evening now. So many of them are decorated that they don't make such a fuss of him there. There was a photographer from *Izvestia* round this morning to take his photograph. Poor Oleg looked as though he were going to be shot, but the photographer got him excited talking about his blue-prints and managed to get a quick photograph before he knew what was happening. How is baby feeding?"

"Oh, she's grand," replied Ludmilla, with all the assurance of a mother of six. "She gobbles away like anything."

"One of these days," said the Doctor mysteriously, "something nice may happen. I won't say what . . . just you wait. By the way, I haven't given baby *my* present yet. Here it is. They're for when she's older—all the way from Turkestan."

The present was a pair of girl's slippers, beautifully embroidered in gold thread and bright colours.

"Your Uncle Fedor and Auntie Sofia are coming from Leningrad to-morrow to see baby. We're having a party at my flat to-morrow night—Soviet champagne and *kishmish* and all manner of good things—to celebrate the baby's arrival and Oleg's decoration and your Uncle's visit. Shame you won't be there, but I'll save you some *kishmish*, I promise. By



the way, what are you going to name baby? Have you made up your mind?"

"I'd like to call her Elizavetta," said Ludmilla. "For dear Madame Borodina. Elizavetta Alexandrovna Vassilieva . . . that's a good name, isn't it?"

"Very good," said the Doctor, "and now it's time for your rest. Let me tuck you up comfortably."

The party at Doctor Kravchenko's was in full swing. Agasha had come to lend a hand and Petka was dancing round the room pouring out the Soviet champagne with a lavish hand. Uncle Fedor, with a big pipe in his mouth and his thumbs comfortably tucked into his broad leather belt, was indulging in memories of the Civil War with Professor Borodin. It appeared that they had several times fought on the same fronts and been quite near each other without ever having actually met.

Auntie Sofia was talking earnestly to Doctor Kravchenko about the new baby, and Mamma Pavlova, who had a nice sense of occasions, was making much of the embarrassed scientist. Father and Mother Vassiliev and several of their older children were clinking glasses cheerfully. Polina, cheeks bright pink from excitement and champagne, was solemnly helping Agasha hand round the salads and sweetmeats.

"Well, Professor," said old Uncle Fedor, raising his bushy white eyebrows thoughtfully, "what do you make of the political situation? The tension in Europe seems to have reached bursting-point. Do you think Hitler would dare attack us? Italy wouldn't be much of an ally, if he did. Japan might, of course."

"There's no real anti-fascist unity in Europe," replied the Professor. "Therefore, Hitler might strike westward, not eastward. There's rich booty in the British and French Empires, not to mention the Dutch East Indies. But, of course, sooner or later he will attack us . . . that's inevitable. He's frightened of us, and that's why he'll attack. But he may not strike at us first. He's a fool as well as a maniac if he doesn't realize how well-armed and united we are."

Uncle Fedor nodded gravely.

"Well, Professor Borodin, it's our children who will be the main defenders of our country this time . . . your Boris and Petka, and Grisha and Sasha. My two poor lads, who were carried off by typhus during the famine, would have been just the right age for the Red Army if they'd lived. Not that we old ones can't teach the young ones a thing or two. *We* didn't have all this wonderful new machinery to fight with, did we, old man, when we forged our Red Army out of nothing but determination and stout hearts. Yes, and beat back invasion on how many fronts? Those were glorious days. I am proud to have fought in them. Now our Red Army has wonderful tanks and guns that can fire faster and farther than we could have dreamed of. And the lads in the Red Army are so well-fed and spruce and well educated. Kravchenko tells me that our newest big planes can carry quite large tanks into action . . . amazing, isn't it? . . . like Sinbad the Sailor and his giant Roc that carried great boulders in its claws. And you should see the youngsters parachute-jumping. I rub my eyes when I go to our Park and see them training from the Tower. I can hardly believe what I see."

"Petka has got his certificate already," replied the Professor, not without pride. "And Polina is training for hers. It's as natural to our young people as horse-riding was to us in our young days."

"Yes, they're a remarkable generation," sighed Uncle Fedor. "And we're proud of them and rightly so. For they are opening the doors to a new life . . . a good, fearless, worthwhile life of service and adventure such as every human should live. But sometimes I ask myself. How will they stand up to the horrors of modern war? They've only known of murder and cruelty through hearsay. I can't help wondering if maybe we haven't made things a bit easy for them (not that they don't get plenty of discipline, of course); a bit too happy and peace-minded. For war *will* come. And before long. The best we can do is to stave it off as long

as we can . . . so that we can prepare ourselves as much as possible and so that Hitlerism may be weakened from within by its internal contradictions and from without by the drainage of war on other fronts. But nevertheless it is bound to be a hideous and bloody war when it does come. In a country with so large a land boundary as the U.S.S.R., invasion will be a nightmare. What sort of account will our young people give of themselves when the blow falls ? ”

Petka, who had been listening with deep interest, stood upright and stuck out his chest.

“ Uncle,” he cried, flexing his muscles of his right arm so that they should all see the bulge, “ Uncle, look at that. Trust us. We shall never let you down.”

“ Attaboy ! ” cried Jane, raising her glass to his biceps, and Miss Parker broke her evening’s silence by saying : “ Forgive me for butting in, but I’ve taught three generations of Russians and I hope to teach a fourth ; I am sure this is the finest Russia has ever produced.”

Outside was a bitter cold day, black and windy. People hurried home through the snow, their noses buried in their fur collars. Inside the maternity ward it was warm and peaceful. Nurses moved quietly about their tasks, and the ward was pleasantly lit by shaded lights. Ludmilla had just finished feeding her daughter. It was half-past six in the morning. And she was holding the baby up to look at the small face she was beginning to love dearly. The baby moved its lips about hopefully, stared unwinkingly out of unseeing eyes, clenched its small fist round Ludmilla’s finger, and made the faintest cooing noises.

“ You sweet, sweet thing,” murmured Ludmilla. “ You have the funniest profile. I wish you could see yourself, my precious. You would laugh. You’ve got a tiny little snub nose, then your top lip sticks out more than your lower lip and you haven’t any chin yet, darling, really you haven’t. No one could say for sure where your neck starts. . . . Then there’s your hair streaming down the back of your neck. You look rather like a sparrow caught in the rain. You can’t see and you’ve no teeth. All you can do is drink. No one but you and me know that you are going to be the finest engineer in the Soviet Union in twenty years’ time.”

The telephone beside her bed rang. Ludmilla put down the baby and picked up the receiver. This was a most unusual time for anyone to make a call.

“ Hold on, Vassilieva. Trunks want you, Comrade,” said the telephone operator from the office downstairs. There was a honk-honk, then a voice said, “ Is that Ludmilla Ivanovna Vassilieva ? England wants to speak

to you . . . hold on. I'll connect you. The line's not so good to-night, I'm afraid."

Ludmilla's heart started to beat violently. She pressed the receiver to her ear. Another voice broke into the crackling.

"This is Warsaw speaking. Warsaw. We are putting you through now." Again a crackling and an abrupt voice snapped: "Berlin speaking. We are connecting you." Immediately afterwards came the operator's voice from Paris and then a hearty English voice with a marked Lancashire accent said:

"Halloa . . . halloa. Is that Moscow? O.K. Moscow, Manchester wants you. You're through. Here, lad" . . . and then the crackling started again. . . . Ludmilla clung to the receiver. "Yes, yes, it's Moscow . . . it's me . . . it's Ludmilla speaking . . . Ludmilla. Oh, SASHA . . . SASHINKE, is that really you?"

The moment Sasha had received the cable announcing the birth of his daughter he had tried to ring up his wife. Three times he had made the long midnight journey to the Manchester G.P.O. hoping to get through to the number Doctor Kravchenko had cabled him. And three times, after hours of delay and restless hanging about, the line was out of order or there was to be a delay of so long a duration that he couldn't wait because of his work. This time was the fourth attempt. He had tried hard not to hope so that he wouldn't have that flat feeling of exasperated disappointment to accompany him on his long walk back to Stretford in the dim hours of the morning. And this time a miracle was happening. Here he was doubled up inside a phone-box of the Manchester General Post Office actually listening, through the honkings and cracklings, to the voice of his wife, lying in a snug warm bed in the maternity ward of a Moscow hospital.

"Ludmilla, darling Ludmilla, is that you?"

"Oh, Sasha, Sashinke, is that really you?"

"Yes, of course it's me. I've been trying to get through to you for a week. . . . How are you, Ludmilla?"

"I'm grand. So's baby. I'm holding her now."

"O! what's she like? Is she pretty?"

"Well . . . perhaps not pretty . . . not yet. Give her a chance. Oh! I've so much to say . . ." and Ludmilla couldn't think of anything at all except "Oh! How are you?" Nor could Sasha, except to gasp, "Oh, I'm fine. How are you?"

Then the operator said, "Your time is nearly up," and at that moment Elizavetta Alexandrovna Vassilieva lifted her voice and began to wail loudly.

From busy peaceful Moscow the wail travelled through Warsaw and from Warsaw through Berlin and from Berlin through Paris and from Paris

through to London and from London to Manchester, so that Sasha, right across a keyed-up Europe on the very edge of war, heard the voice of his child for the first time.

Then the operator said : " Your time is up, sir," and a French voice said : " C'est terminé," and a German voice snapped : " Geendet," and a languid Polish voice said in excellent English, " Your time is up now. . . . What's the weather like in England. It's thirty-five below here. Brrr," and a hearty Russian voice said, " Konchyet Tovarish."

Sasha dropped the receiver and rushed to the clerk on duty at the central desk.

" I have spoke with my wife," he cried ecstatically, " in Moskva. I have heard my baby cry."

" By gum, lad, that's a bit of all right," said the clerk. " I've got six meself like. . . . Hey, steady lad, steady . . . whoa !" for Sasha had seized him fraternally in his mighty arms and was implanting a kiss on both his astonished cheeks.



# *Russian Families*

## I

### *Wedding Eve*

It is a freezing winter night in Moscow. We are walking along the Boulevard Serpuchovka. The wind cuts like a steel knife. Overhead, brilliant stars stab the purple sky and beneath our feet the snow has swirled in eddies, leaving wicked patches of black ice.

We walk briskly to keep warm, cautiously to prevent falling. Here we turn right through this gateway into the snowbound gardens of a large block of flats. It is late. The band has left the skating-rink and hardly anyone is about. Look up at all those lighted windows. Three hundred families live here with their hopes and sorrows, their difficulties and triumphs. Come in . . . let's see for ourselves what's going on.

Now we have climbed up to the third landing . . . this will do. Here are three flats . . . 309, 310, 311. Shall we go inside? As it happens it is the night before Rest-day and most of the people who live on this landing are gathered together in flat 309 to drink tea with the Pavlov family. This happens often, for the Pavlov family are very hospitable and Mamma Pavlova likes her neighbours.

Here we are in the sitting-room of the Pavlov flat. It is a big, spotlessly clean room lighted by an ornamental hanging lamp covered in a shade of frilled yellow silk. Heavy curtains are drawn across the double windows. On the cream-coloured walls hang a few family photographs, and there is a modest bookshelf in one corner. On the carved wooden sideboard is a curious assortment of old and new china, and on the embroidered linen table-cloth a shining metal samovar is steaming away cheerfully. Perched snugly on the top of the samovar is Mamma Pavlova's favourite teapot, a handsome one of flowery pink china with a gold knob on the lid and a curly gold handle. It is only brought out on special occasions. This is one of them . . . it is the eve of the marriage of Ludmilla, her daughter. There she is, with her husband-to-be, Sasha Vassiliev; they are sitting side by side on the big ottoman looking as blissful as mating pigeons.

Ludmilla is just twenty and works in the local textile factory. She is sturdily built and athletic. She has a snub nose and a wide laughing